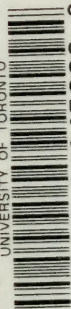


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RENCH
HEADQUARTERS

JEAN DE
PIERREFEU

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



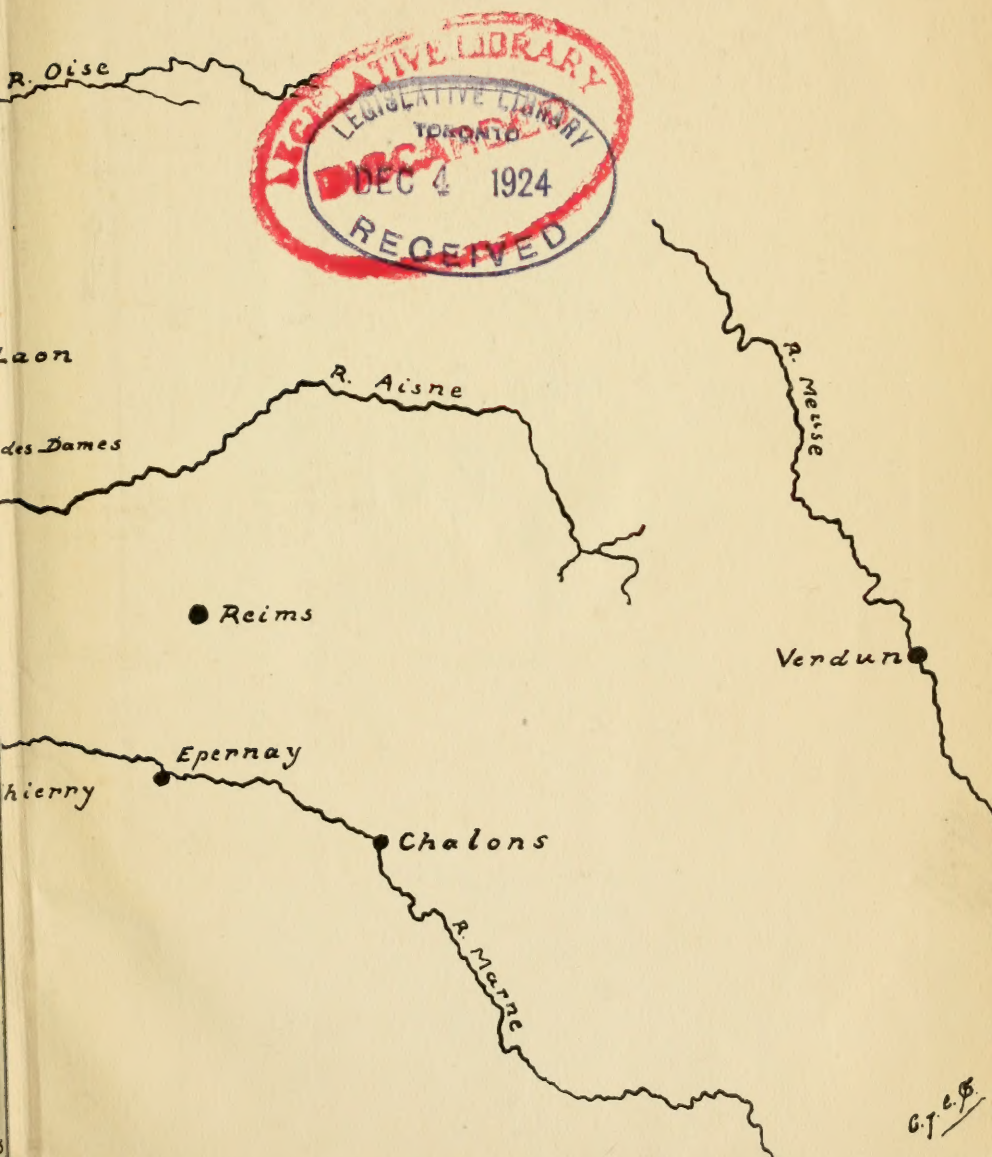
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A hand-drawn map of Northern France, showing the Somme, Scheldt, and Oise rivers. The map includes several cities marked with dots: Montreuil (British G.H.Q.), Lens, Arras, Doullens, Cambrai, Abbeville, Amiens, Peronne, St. Quentin, Noyon, Beauvais, Compiègne, Soissons, Chantilly, Paris, and Chau. The Somme river flows from the northwest towards Amiens. The Scheldt river flows from the northeast towards Cambrai. The Oise river flows from the east towards Paris. Paris is marked with a shaded square. The map is titled 'Northern France' at the top.

● Mons

Scale 1 inch rep. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles
(approx.)

Headquarters thus X





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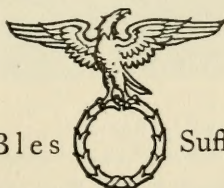
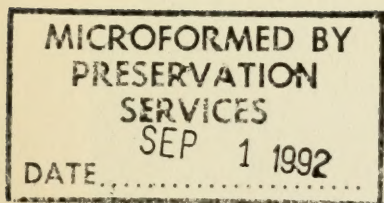
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HEADQUARTERS
1915—1918

By
JEAN DE PIERREFEU

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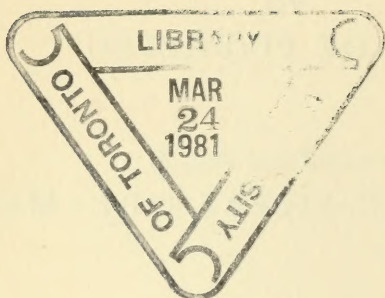
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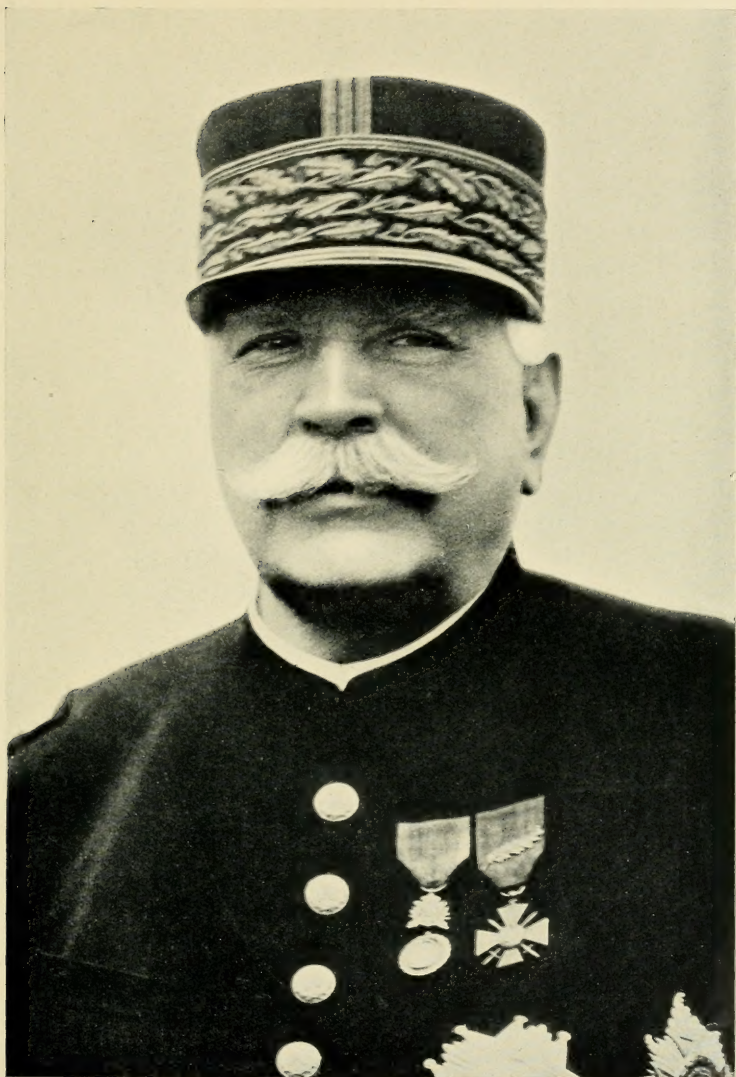
MAJOR C. J. C. STREET, O.B.E., M.C.



Geoffrey Bles Suffolk St., Pall Mall
London

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MARSHAL JOFFRE

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INTRODUCTION

IN this book, which has gone into many editions in its native country, M. Jean de Pierrefeu recounts his experiences at French Military Headquarters from November, 1915, until the end of the Great War.

As his own narrative shows, he was appointed to G.Q.G. (*Grand Quartier Général*) for the purposes of drawing up the daily *communiqué*, a duty which brought him into personal contact with most of the more famous French commanders and staff officers. His keen sense of observation and his telling powers of description have enabled him to convey a series of impressions of these men and of the conditions under which they worked which may well rank with the work of the greater historians.

But the book is by no means merely a record of events or a catalogue of personalities. From it the English-speaking reader may derive an insight into many things which puzzled him at the time of their occurrence, and which have never been satisfactorily explained from the French civilian point of view. Much has been said and written, for example, of Nivelle's tragic spring offensive of 1917, and of the epidemic of mutiny in the French Army which followed it. In this narrative the author, a soldier for the moment, but essentially a civilian at heart, preserving the statesman's rather than the soldier's outlook, concerns himself not so much with the events themselves, as with the conditions which led up to them. He shows us Nivelle, swept to the leadership of the French armies, over the heads of men like Castelnau and Pétain, on a wave of popular enthusiasm bred of his success at Verdun, and desperately anxious to accom-

plish something on a scale to justify his sudden elevation. We see his failure, inevitable from the first, rendered even more certain by his own impetuosity ; we see the consequences of that failure, which, in the author's own words, "very nearly discouraged the French Army for ever," and which it took Pétain a year to repair.

M. Pierrefeu's hero of the war is Pétain, the man who was called upon to take over the command from Nivelle, and who, with infinite perseverance, steadied the failing morale of the troops until once more they became fit to bear the strain of retreat and even more rapid advance during the last phase of the war. To the English-speaking reader it may seem that the author fails somewhat in full appreciation of the part played by France's allies—it should never be forgotten, for example, that from August 8th to November 11th, 1918, the British Army took 188,700 prisoners, while during the same period the combined French, Belgian and American captures totalled 196,800. But it must be borne in mind that the author is before everything else a patriotic Frenchman, burning with pride of his country, and writing primarily of the French effort. He sees in Pétain the embodiment of the true French spirit, persevering in the face of the disapproval and even open opposition of lesser men, soldiers as well as politicians. To him, Pétain is the man who won the war, and in his whole-hearted admiration of the man and his methods we have at least an interesting appreciation of a soldier by a civilian peculiarly qualified to judge of his merits.

Of the historical merits of the book there can be no doubts, but its principal appeal is to the general reader who is interested in the human motives which govern events.



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FOREWORD

THIS work is a faithful account of the observations I was enabled to make at General Headquarters during the course of the three years that I spent there as the official "Eyewitness." Although I have committed no indiscretion in depicting the surroundings of the High Command, and have divulged none of its secrets, I should doubtless have refrained from initiating the public into the inner life of the commanders and their Staff, had not certain of the more famous generals themselves taken their readers behind the scenes of the war for their own personal reasons. No one can blame me for imitating them in a purely literary manner.

In writing these pages, I need hardly say that I have not been swayed by any feeling of rancour or of disappointed ambition. I found always at G.Q.G., at the hands of my superiors and colleagues, the warmest welcome and the most complete understanding, and I think that they will be able to discover beneath my little sallies and the pointed and sometimes amusing anecdotes which I relate, the profound sympathy, and often admiration, which inspired me while writing these notes. I have endeavoured to collect, in the manner of Taine, a group of true incidents, and from them to draw, quite impartially, a general conclusion for which I alone am responsible. If I have not been able to resist the temptation of giving certain scenes the picturesque touch and air of interest which they possessed as they unrolled themselves before my eyes (even at the risk of impairing the style of a work which, on the whole, is of an historic nature), and of falling occasionally

into the manner of a satirical or even fantastic essay, I beg forgiveness. There is in every critic, and perhaps in every historian, something of the repressed novelist, who tries to take his revenge, rather like an old cart-horse which remembers that it used to be a thoroughbred, and begins to curvet and arch its neck.

My principal fear is lest I should be judged by incomplete quotations taken from the book for a more or less frankly avowed purpose. Like all books written from personal observation, this book aims at Truth, and Truth alone; and therefore appreciation is to be found side by side with criticism. Only those who read the book in its entirety can acquire a precise idea of my opinions. I beg my readers to depend only upon their own judgment in forming their opinion of my work.

PART I

THE FRENCH
GENERAL STAFF

CHAPTER I

Chantilly

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS! What this glorious name could mean was difficult to imagine when one was only a humble infantry N.C.O. With little knowledge of the military hierarchy, and struck dumb with terror before the all-powerful presence of a colonel, the reservist of 1914 and 1915 could scarcely conceive such an autocrat as a Commander-in-Chief. He was too distant, too elevated; his head was lost in the clouds, like that of God the Father. With a recollection of old battle pictures, one had visions of a group of officers, covered with gold lace, prancing round an august and impassive personage who issued orders.

But for all that, however dim the conception of this Olympian might be, the idea of his superhuman power was felt down to the last man. From the very day when the C.S.M. had announced in a voice harsh, but tinged with respect, the fateful words, "So-and-so posted to G.Q.G.," the Chosen One felt like Moses descending from Mount Sinai.

On being taken before his company commander, he became an object of solicitude. "Has he got all his papers? Give him a new cap. Those trousers don't fit him. See that he has a fresh equipment." And then with a smile of satisfaction: "We must make you look smart, my friend, before we send you over there."

The N.C.O.'s in the office showed a desire to call attention to their abilities and became unusually affable. At the moment of his departure, one of them, taking the Chosen One aside, whispered in his

ear: "Look here, old chap, if you see anything in my line over there, don't forget me."

Over there! The Chosen One trembled before the prospect of the unknown.

From this moment a triumphal way opened before him. Already he no longer belonged to the common run of mortals; a curious sanctity had suddenly descended upon him.

The route bore upon it the name of the nearest regulating station, followed by the words, "To be sent on to G.Q.G."

At the first stop the R.T.O., overwhelmed with work, was struggling with an inrush of leave-men, and sending his people flying in all directions. But, when the Chosen One handed him his papers, his irritation vanished before the three omnipotent letters, "G.Q.G."

A second route was issued, as far as a second regulating station. It was useless to ask in what direction one was being sent. "I don't know," was the answer to every question. "If you find out yourself, forget it."

Every one in France knew that, in 1915, G.Q.G. was at Chantilly. Several papers, in spite of the censorship, had printed the fact. But for all that the ban of silence remained rigid, and no child's secret was even better kept. But once Le Bourget was reached, a corner of the veil was lifted. The R.T.O. at Le Bourget alone, it appeared, was entitled to inscribe in all its glory the forbidden word "Chantilly."

All this mystery could hardly fail to impress the traveller. And at last the arrival at Chantilly put the finishing touch to his emotions.

Just as palaces spread their carpets out beyond the entrance, in order to accentuate the grandeur of their welcome, General Headquarters extended its Staff atmosphere right up to the arrival platform. Three officers with artillery badges on their collars, and bands of white satin round their *képis*, did the honours of the station, so to speak. Never did Masters of Ceremonies, appointed to introduce ambassadors,

discharge their duties with greater dignity and courtesy. Tightly gloved, encircled with Sam Browne belts, faultless in bearing and manner, they stood upon the threshold of the famous town, examining with a trained eye the various passengers, and quite pitilessly they turned away all those who could not show impeccable credentials. A squad of gendarmes, reinforced by a party of civilian detectives, sifted the arrivals. Even though he might be a general, no officer who was not provided with a pass or a letter of appointment could pass the barrier.

But if one could show an order authorizing one's presence, one's welcome became charming. Whatever might be the rank of the new-comer, the station staff went out of their way to direct him. *Esprit de corps*, or rather the *esprit de caste*, made them treat alike all who came to G.Q.G. You immediately felt that you were no longer a unit in the crowd. Your very selection, the choice exercised in your favour, gave you a certain standing. You were a member of the *élite*. Lieutenant or sergeant, you were doubtless the best to be found in those ranks. Why else should you have been chosen? You had scarcely basked in the sun's brilliance before one of its rays became yours; and once invested with the badges of the Staff, the humblest shared its formidable power. It was under these conditions that on November 23rd, 1915, the writer, getting out of the train at Chantilly, gained the impression that he was about to enter the service of a very great house.

At this very moment an officer with a *képi* decorated with oak-leaves arrived at the station to take the train to Paris, which was about to start. This general officer belonged, of course; to the Staff. The R.T.O. sprang forward to meet him, presumably to inquire after his health. He led the Great One to the train, chose a carriage, put the light suit-case he carried on the seat beside him, and carried on a lively conversation while the train waited. The whistle blew and the train began to move out. There was a regulation salute on the part of the R.T.O., a friendly gesture

on the part of the traveller. "Good-bye, General, *bon voyage*. . . ."

The author lost the sense of time. In a moment he found himself in imagination among the followers of the Prince de Condé or the Duc d'Aumale. Doubtless he would very shortly see the Court, would perhaps attend at the return from a stag-hunt in which the King had been engaged. But no, this was 1915, and war-time at that. It was an illusion.

* * * * *

In the station yard, motor-cars with blazing headlights hooted furiously. One of them took my baggage. An orderly was to take me to my quarters. The winter night had fallen ; it was raining and great muddy pools showed here and there. We entered a leafless wood by a dismal avenue, and in front of me appeared the illuminated façade of the Hôtel du Grand Condé. We had arrived, and, to my surprise, discovered that G.Q.G. was not installed in a château. I had pictured the lowered drawbridge, the entrance full of a crowd of dispatch-riders, with their horses pawing the ground impatiently.

In place of this war-like show was the Hôtel du Grand Condé, which brought back to me the days of the Prix de Diane, with its crowd of men in dinner jackets and elegantly dressed women dining at the little tables in the great glazed dining-room, at the end of which was the gipsy orchestra. There, on the left of the grill, was the American Bar, still with the words "American drinks" above it. It was to this very spot that the orderly led me. Was he about to offer me a cocktail before we went any farther ? But the American Bar of the Grand Condé no longer held a mahogany counter and high stools. Behind deal tables covered with green cloth were secretaries writing or typing. Gendarmes came and went. One of them was telephoning, and could be heard speaking respectfully :

"Certainly, Colonel. . . . Yes, Colonel. . . . A big limousine to be at your quarters to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. . . . I understand, sir. . . . Very good, sir."

I handed in my route to one of the gendarmes who came forward to meet me. After a short wait, I was shown into an office. A captain of gendarmerie, dark and very affable, rose from his chair and held out his hand. "Delighted to see you, my dear fellow," he said.

His "dear fellow"! What did it mean? I was only a sergeant-major. Where was I? His air of extreme affability and the courtesy of his greeting, quite unknown in the ranks and very rare in civil life, plunged me in amazement. The mystery was soon explained. It appeared that I had received a second-lieutenant's commission, though I knew nothing about it. He notified my chief by telephone of my arrival, and I was immediately led trembling into the sanctuary.

* * * * *

The Hôtel du Grand Condé converted into G.Q.G. wore a very martial air. On the threshold two gendarmes in helmets and girded with shoulder-belts mounted guard. In the hall a group of orderlies waited at a round table. When an officer passed, all rose as one man and saluted him simultaneously. In front of the lift a gendarme in sky-blue uniform awaited the pleasure of those who wished to avail themselves of his services. And everywhere thick carpets deadened the sound of feet.

On the first floor were more orderlies. My guide handed me over to one of them, who knocked at a door and opened it for me. I noticed on this door a placard bearing the words, "*Section d'Information.*" Thank Heavens, I knew the two kindly men who occupied this room!

One of them, Captain Gabriel Puaux, of the Diplomatic Service, now an officer of the Staff, was then in charge of that department, which he was about to leave, having been recalled by the Quai d'Orsay. The other, Second-Lieutenant Maurice Pernot, correspondent of the *Journal des Débats* at Rome and Vienna, had been appointed to succeed him.

After the first greetings, they discovered, to their

dismay, that I still bore a sergeant-major's stripes on my sleeves.

"Hullo! Didn't they tell you that you had received a commission?"

"No, this is the first I've heard of it."

"That's a nuisance. You can't very well take your place in the Third Bureau like that. It would be a scandal. You must know that it consists wholly of senior officers. No one ever heard of a N.C.O. among them. What's to be done?"

Captain Puaux had a sudden inspiration. He took his scissors from the table and held them out to me.

"Cut off your stripes, your uniform's all right. It won't be examined too closely. And then I will introduce you as a second-lieutenant. But to-morrow, don't forget to go to a tailor to have your badges of rank put on, order your uniform, and buy a *képi*. Look sharp, it's nearly dinner-time."

I took off my jacket and we talked of the duties awaiting me, while in my shirt-sleeves I clumsily worked with the scissors at my offending sleeves.

I learnt that the Information Section had the honour to be attached to the Third Bureau, the Operations Department. My chief's tone told me more of the importance of this Operations Department (whose name I heard for the first time) than all his explanations. I gained the impression that I was about to take my place at the same table as the demi-gods of the war, who laid down upon the maps the course that operations were to follow. And to complete my discomfiture, I learnt that after dinner I was to be introduced to Major-General Pellé. What was to be done with me? I very soon learnt.

"You are to be put in charge of the Official *Communiqué*."

A thunderbolt falling at my feet could not have produced a greater effect. The words which the whole of France read in its papers with such eagerness, the words which were pasted on the windows of the great newspaper offices while the crowd struggled for a nearer view of them, these words were

to be written by—me! But surely it was Joffre who wrote them? Perhaps he composed them himself, and I should only have to write them at his dictation?

I inquired eagerly. "Not a bit of it. Joffre only approves the *communiqué* when it has been written. But you'll see. I'll show you to-morrow morning. To-morrow evening you'll have to manage for yourself, as I have to go away on duty. It's half-past six, let's go and dine."

* * * * *

We made our way to a villa opposite the Grand Condé, on the other side of the avenue. In the hall, I saw a dozen *képis* on a trunk, decorated with stripes. Voices reached me, and I heard one saying: "He's a fellow who has come in for rapid promotion; we were together at the Staff College in 1900. He's wasted no time, you see, since he's a lieutenant-colonel."

I entered the comfortable dining-room behind my cicerone; old furniture, china on the walls, and in the centre a big table covered with silver. Standing round the fireplace was a group of officers wearing many decorations. I was introduced. I heard the words colonel, major, constantly repeated. Their names escaped me. Their rank was sufficient, and this high-sounding recital embarrassed me more and more. I was given a place next my cicerone. Another officer came in, and my guide whispered to me: "That's Colonel Renouard, Second-in-Charge of the Operations Department, the mess president." He rubbed his hands, and inspected me with a quick glance, at once kindly and sharp, while I was being introduced. Then he sat down, and the rest followed his example.

What a strange fate had overtaken me! Yesterday a N.C.O. travelling second-class; to-day sitting in the most brilliant company of officers that it was possible to imagine. Beyond, in the mud of the trenches, hundreds of thousands of men faced the enemy, ready to obey orders, ignorant of what would happen the following moment, the humble machinery

of an omnipotent will. And those I saw before me were the very men who by a stroke of the pen put armies in motion, ordered battles and attacks; masters of the life and death of those who fought.

I ate in silence. The cooking was excellent. Two soldiers in white coats waited on us with the skill of professional waiters. To occupy my mind, I counted the rank stripes on the sleeves resting lightly on the table-cloth. Fifty-two, without including my own, which were not yet in place.

Conversation became general. I hoped to learn important secrets concerning the progress of the war, to discover the decisive blows that were in store for the enemy. I had often heard Ministers talking in the privacy of their homes and openly broaching the most delicate governmental questions to the delight of their audience. Nothing of the kind happened here. All lips were silent and not a word was said which could remind one that a most terrible war was in progress. All these officers were in high spirits. They joked, like schoolboys making fun of their masters. They told stories of the generals with whom they dealt. One of them, a liaison officer, had returned that very evening from Foch's headquarters, and mimicked the general. With his left hand in the opening of his jacket, he sawed the air with his right. "You understand, I attack here, I attack there, I break through, I tumble them head over heels." His hand indicated his dispositions, seemed to feel its way among the troops; and then his closed fist struck at the routed enemy. His incisive voice, at one moment jerky, became explosive. He raised his chin, flicked up the peak of his *képi*. Then, throwing himself back in his chair, he drew out an imaginary cigar, and held it under his nose to enjoy the aroma. Finally, having tried several times to light the cigar at a distance, like a far-sighted person reads, he laid it on his glass. Shouts of laughter greeted this performance; all were delighted with the fidelity of voice and gesture. "He is an amazing character," remarked an officer, meaning,

presumably, the general, and not his imitator. And he embarked upon another story. Foch, when he was Commandant of the Staff College, used to receive his colleagues on Sundays. One day one of them arrived in plain clothes, and as he came in laid his magnificent top-hat on the mantelpiece. Foch, who, as usual, was pacing backwards and forwards talking hard, suddenly discovered that his eternal cigar had gone out. He tore a piece out of a newspaper which happened to be handy, made a spill of it, held it to the fire and lighted his cigar with it. Then with a mechanical gesture he flung the lighted paper into the top-hat, to the great distress of his unhappy subordinate, who did not dare to stir from his seat.

The merriment increased at this story. Everybody had an anecdote to tell of General Foch, whose absence of mind, fits of rage, and original ways were celebrated throughout the Army.

But apropos of some event in his career, the talk turned upon promotion. Once established on this basis, the conversation became impassioned. Until dessert nothing was discussed save personalities, pensions, exchanges. From the storehouse of a surprising memory these men recalled the dates of admission to the Staff College of an infinite number of officers, the time they had spent in each rank, and their chances of promotion. Most of them seemed to know the Army List by heart.

When we rose, I had learnt no more than that the officer of the Operations Department was concerned with the prospects of his career, as were probably all the officers of all the departments. But at the end of three-quarters of an hour, I could scarcely expect to know the eminent men among whom I had been summoned to live.

* * * * *

The first impression produced by General Pellé, Major-General of the French armies, was one of a smiling, refined, and most agreeable man. He is not in the least of the military type, and, in spite of his khaki uniform, he reminds one of a diplomat of the

old school. He showed no wish to create an impression by a coldness of manner, no desire to put a new-comer in his place. On the contrary, he was obviously trying hard to appear hospitable. "I am very happy to meet you," he seemed to say, bowing, and in a couple of seconds you were no longer a subordinate being introduced, and wondering nervously what sort of an impression you were producing, but a visitor being thanked for your graciousness, a collaborator who had consented to place his special qualifications at the service of the Staff. "You are a journalist?" the General asked me. "A literary critic besides? You have never dabbled in politics? Excellent! Here we have a horror of politics. Tardieu dabbled in them, unfortunately, or rather he used to do so. But that was enough to make him an object of suspicion. And then he was a deputy, which aroused the jealousy of his colleagues. In Paris they persist in thinking that we are riddled with politics. They declare that we withhold the truth, that we twist events to suit our own interests. You will see for yourself that that is not so. You are used to dealing with the public. You will tell it everything that happens, in the *communiqué*, using, of course, the care and circumspection which is necessary in dealing with that great sensitive child, the French people. The first essential is to be perfectly clear, to avoid any ambiguity or appearance of secrecy. The Press has a great part to play; it must inspire the country with confidence."

I pleaded my ignorance. I begged indulgence for this work which I was about to undertake and was yet a closed book to me. I could only guarantee one thing, my whole-hearted will to do my best and my ardent desire to succeed in my task. The General reassured me. "I will teach you," he said; "for the first few days we will draw up the *communiqué* together. You will see how quickly you get into it. Besides, it is very often the same thing."

It was eleven o'clock when I left the General's office. In the ante-room several senior officers with

bundles of files in their hands awaited their turn. They looked inquiringly at this person who apparently held no rank, who had just been received and now blushing slipped between them towards the door.

The author here devotes a chapter to what we may call the "atmosphere" he found at G.Q.G. He touches upon the pitfalls that beset the path of a junior officer posted to this august company of "brass hats," and gives a few hints as to the behaviour he should adopt. "Nothing could be more unsuitable than the cut-and-dried attitude of a soldier in the presence of his superior officer, halted at four paces distant, arms by the side, head up, eyes front, or the ceremonial and sweeping salute. Such manners are vulgar. As Voltaire said of religion, they are for the people. However low your rank may be, from the moment when you are an officer on the Staff, you belong to the same world as your most exalted chiefs. In entering it you have acquired a certain social equality. Achieve that ease of manner which shows that to consciousness of your own inferiority you have added an appreciation of your merit."

The author then proceeds to discuss the infinite gradations which exist at all Headquarters. "Science teaches us that the most highly involved organisms are at the same time the most differentiated. In the light of this, G.Q.G. must certainly be the very highest form of social evolution. A ditch, admittedly not very deep, separates the entourage from the Third Bureau, but a great gulf separates the Third Bureau from the Second and the First. But for all that these four form an aristocracy closed to the *Courrier*, the Cipher Section, the Topographical Section, the Intelligence Section, the *Commandement*, and the whole organization of the Lines of Communication.

"Besides these general distinctions, there are others purely personal. A major who has passed the Staff College is worthy of more consideration than a colonel who has not. An officer of combatant troops takes precedence of an attached officer, an interpreter, an administrative officer, or an officer of the administrative, supply or sanitary services. . . . It is unnecessary to say that all these shades pale before the one great distinction, which is the very foundation of the whole organism, the distinction between regular and temporary officers. An administrative officer, however lowly his position, even though he be a retired warrant officer promoted for the occasion, has certain rights to promotion and gratuity denied to the temporary officer.

"The temporary officer's position in civil life may cause him to meet with sympathy and consideration, but it is an idea fixed firmly in the military brain that in the Army he can never be more than an amateur."

"It is easy to understand the embarrassment of the new-comer

faced by so many difficulties, and failing to understand them, ignorant of whither to turn for enlightenment. His first instinct is to place excessive trust in his subordinates, to fling himself into the arms of some confidential orderly or secretary and seek help from them. And this is the first pitfall. Such familiarities are looked at askance. An officer of G.Q.G. must never be seen in the company of a private or a N.C.O. under penalty of being suspected unworthy of his rank."

The author then proceeds to draw a picture of life at G.Q.G. "Except during meal-times the messes are empty. The officers enter them when they leave their offices at 11 a.m. or noon. There is no dallying. As soon as the last mouthful is taken, the president rises and everybody follows his example. Some return straight to their offices, others take a turn in the forest, on foot or on horseback, for riding is the only distraction allowed, although even this is denied to dismounted infantry officers. In winter, when it is impossible to go out after five o'clock, the Staff works till dinner. After dinner one's office is one's sole refuge, till ten o'clock at least. Those who suffer from insomnia work still later. A certain number are detailed for night duty. Those who are free to do so go to bed. And so on day after day.

"In short, life at G.Q.G. resembles that of a monastery without the intimacy of chapel or the moral repose conferred by religious exercises. It would be more exact to compare it with a school where games were abolished and the boys were confined to their studies, the dining-hall and the dormitory. The result is a gloomy application, a joyless automatism. An atmosphere of constraint weighs heavily upon the whole establishment. The only resource left to the professional soldiers is the carrying out of their duties, upon which their prospects depend. From this arises a terrible competition between the offices to produce work, manifested by an unceasing flow of papers.

"It cannot be conceived that an officer can seat himself at his desk and produce anything but memoranda, reports, states, or minutes. And since he can go nowhere but to his office, he is constrained to make work. Thus there arises no difference between productive and non-productive labour.

"In France, leisure has never been recognized. It is considered a manifestation of laziness. Games themselves share this suspicion. While the English Staff played tennis, rackets, or bridge, while they gave receptions at which their officers met one another, our Staffs, particularly G.Q.G., set their faces completely against all distractions.

"How weary and distasteful were my first days at G.Q.G. ! . . . The *communiqué*, although it was a period of calm, provided me twice a day with a difficult problem. The reports from the armies, brought me incessantly from eleven in the morning to nine at night, bristled with difficulties. Unknown names confronted me, and these I was forced to find on the map. I consulted feverishly the

Gazetteer of France, which became my most trusted counsellor. And how to ascertain which bombardments were worthy of mention among all those spread along the whole point ? Here there would be shelling as a reprisal, there shelling of back areas and communications, elsewhere shelling on both sides. There would be cannonades by the heaviest pieces ; a little farther on intermittent shelling, concentration of fire upon such and such a spot, moderate artillery activity, machine-guns, trench-mortars, great activity, exceptional activity, violent activity, habitual activity. These activities had lasted half an hour, an hour, two hours. Some armies went so far as to recount the calibre of the shell which had fallen.

"I tried to see the Major-General on the subject of my first *communiqué*, but his orderly officer refused me admittance. The General was engaged in a conference. I had no time to wait till he had finished. It was nine o'clock and already the War Office was clamouring for the *communiqué* in order to issue it to the Press. There was nothing for it but to go ahead alone. I compressed all these bombardments as best as I could into thirty lines, varying the formula to avoid monotony. After half an hour of work which brought the sweat to my brow, I took my draft to the orderly officer, who passed it on to the General. Two seconds later he gave it back to me. With a stroke of the pen the General had destroyed my work and had written with his own hand the words, 'On the whole front there is nothing to report.' The lesson was not unheeded. I know now what is meant by a detached view of events."

CHAPTER II

General Joffre's Office

GENERAL JOFFRE'S office was a secret temple which was only entered with trepidation. Very few were admitted to it. Every morning at eight o'clock the heads of departments assembled there for a daily conference, over which the General presided in majestic silence.

The Villa Poiret, in the Boulevard d'Aumale, was reached through a large iron gate and a spacious vestibule, where two orderlies decorated with the Military Medal were permanently stationed. A wide passage led straight to the staircase. On the left were the doors of the various rooms which communicated with one another : the orderly officers' room, the dining-room, a little drawing-room, and then the General's office.

One always went first to the orderly officers. On either side of the window, facing one another as they sat at their desks, were Major de Galbert and Major Thouzelier, the former grave, the latter gay. These two men were absolutely devoted to their Chief.

Major de Galbert's worth was well known to the General, with whom he had worked before the war. The Third Bureau, which had the greatest respect for him, felt that his presence ensured the application of the highest principles to the orders of the Supreme Command. His was a fine character, rather proud and haughty, but inspired by the finest traditions of the Army. He was naturally inclined to noble sentiments. He drew up the Orders of the Day of the Commander-in-Chief, and in these orders he revealed his knowledge of the Napoleonic literature. It was

when he left that the famous remark was made to the Commander-in-Chief himself by a bold spirit: "They take from you your chief supporters in order that they may strike more easily at yourself."

Major Thouzelier radiated courtesy by the very smile on his face, which one might have said was designed for welcome. He was a born orderly officer. Thanks to his consistent cheerfulness, he bore without weariness or ill-humour the painful burden of his gilded slavery. General Joffre, who was sincerely attached to him, had the habit of bullying him by way of keeping his hand in. Major Thouzelier, helped in this respect by General Pellé, bore unflinchingly the harsh words of his Chief whenever events did not shape themselves to his satisfaction.

To the initiated he answered to the name of Toutou, and I rarely heard him called anything else in the Third Bureau, which he often visited, always armed with boxes of chocolates, cigars, and other luxuries, which he handed round. For these presents arrived in such numbers at the General's house that he was compelled to share them with his colleagues. For two years the whole world tendered the victor of the Marne an almost divine worship. The post orderly was literally bent under the weight of boxes, parcels, and letters sent by unknown people and accompanied by fervent declarations of admiration. I think that no general but Joffre can have had such a taste of glory. People sent him boxes of sweets from all the greatest confectioners of the world, cases of champagne, every kind of wine, fruit, game, clothes, smoking requisites, ink-stands, and paper-weights. Every part of the world sent its own speciality. Painters sent their pictures, sculptors their statuettes, old ladies knitted mufflers or socks, shepherds in their huts carved pipes for his use. All the manufacturers in the countries hostile to Germany sent him their products; from Havana came cigars, from Portugal port wine. I heard of a hairdresser who could think of nothing better than making a portrait of the General out of the hair of those dear to him, and of a calligraphist who had

much the same idea, and constructed a portrait out of adulatory phrases in minute characters. As for letters, they came in all handwritings and of all sorts, written in every style—tender letters, grateful letters, letters expressing love and adoration. They styled him “saviour of the world,” “father of his country,” “instrument of God,” “benefactor of humanity,” and so on. Nor did these letters come only from French people, but from Americans, Argentines, Australians, and so forth. Thousands of little children took up their pens unknown to their parents and wrote to him expressing their love. Most of them addressed him as “Our Father.” They had a certain grandeur, these effusions, adorations, sighs of relief, coming from thousands of hearts as the result of his victory. To all these simple hearts Joffre seemed like St. George subduing the dragon. He surely seemed in the eyes of humanity the incarnation of the triumph of Good over Evil, of Light over Darkness.

Lunatics of all grades of madness turned to him in their mental darkness as though towards sanity. I have read a letter from a man in Sydney who begged the General to deliver him from his enemies ; another, a New Zealander, implored him to send a few soldiers to call on a man who owed him ten pounds and would not pay. Finally, hundreds of young girls, putting aside the bashfulness of their sex, begged to become engaged to him unknown to their families ; others only wished to put themselves at his service.

The Commander-in-Chief, although no sign of it appeared on his impassive face, sniffed appreciatively at this incense. He shut himself up for hours together in order to peruse his letters. He looked at all the presents and took away a good many of them. His officers grew weary with the task of writing acknowledgments and letters of thanks, which the General always signed. Sometimes he cast his eyes over the reply, and, finding it too curt, had it done again.

No one could be more obstinate or less easy to manage. Wielding a jealous and almost despotic authority, he complained unceasingly that he was

badly served. In certain political circles it was alleged that he was dominated by his entourage. Nothing could be further from the truth. He was incontestably the master, and there were few who did not tremble in his presence. He would permit no delay, even of five minutes, at meal-times. As soon as meal-times approached, his entourage threw everything aside and hastened to the villa. He rebuked with a glance anyone who had the imprudence to be late and harboured a grudge against him until the end of dinner. He ate silently with an excellent appetite, and appreciated the dishes like a true gourmet. He was constantly afraid of being kept in the dark by his entourage. One day an officer mentioned the current number of *l'Illustration*. The General, who had not seen it, flew into a rage, and declared that everything was kept from him. He frequently said in plaintive tones, passing his hand over his large head, "Poor Joffre." He made use of this mannerism when he did not want to grant a request made of him. He then turned his back on it, and could not be brought to reconsider it. When he was in a good temper, he delivered a friendly blow to his orderly officer with the words, "You damned old Thouzelier!"

Greatly influenced by his first impressions of people, he adhered to them rigidly. He hated anyone who spoke too much, in a loud voice, or too boldly; he liked to observe a modest demeanour in those to whom he spoke. But he loathed embarrassment or an excess of timidity. His judgments were without appeal. One morning a newly arrived colonel, placed temporarily in charge of the department dealing with operations outside France, showed some hesitation in pointing out Monastir on the map. The General got rid of him at once. On the other hand, he liked still less the manner of the barrister who is sure that he carries conviction. He was too jealous of his authority not to take offence if anyone dared too openly to endeavour to make him change his mind. And no doubt he believed, with Talleyrand, that excess of zeal was a fault. It followed that, in order to induce

him to adopt a measure for which he saw no reason, the greatest tact was necessary. General Pellé's life was passed in these constant negotiations. It was strange that the latter, in spite of his exquisite tact, frequently received the full force of the General's ill-temper. "Pellé has caught it again this morning," the entourage used to say when the conference broke up. And I fancy that Joffre, while fully appreciating the value of his Major-General, could not, when he saw the shrewdness in his face, help feeling a certain distrust of him.

It was, however, a wholly unjustifiable mistrust, for General Pellé was the most devoted and the least ambitious of men. The game enthralled him, and he applied all his energies to playing it skilfully. He was oblivious of the advantages which he might have gained by resigning his post. When he was promoted Major-General, Joffre wished to place him automatically in command of a division, a command commensurate with his rank. General Pellé refused, saying that he was a Brigadier of too recent a date and that he did not wish to be the object of favouritism. Joffre, unconvinced, shrugged his shoulders and handed him the signed appointment, telling him that he could do what he liked with it. General Pellé, who had only to send it to the War Office, tore it up and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

I am not sure that General Joffre gave him much credit for his self-abnegation. Such an action must have seemed, to a man of such determination and keen common sense as the Commander-in-Chief, a poetic gesture, and he had no use for poetry. On the contrary, he was fully alive to the ambitions of his colleagues.

Among his other duties, Major Thouzelier was responsible for the accounts. It was no slight matter. The General, simple in his tastes, hated extravagance. Every month, when the Major gave him the bill, he complained of the waste and insisted that expenses should be reduced. The cost of paper, the greater part of which he supplied to G.Q.G., was certainly

enormous. As a result, the quality of it became worse and worse. Beside the beautiful cream-laid paper used by the English Staff, our documents looked very sorry. I should not be surprised if the archives of this war fall rapidly into dust.

Major Thouzelier endured this striving after economy with equanimity; but it gave nightmares to Major Moyran, who succeeded Major Galbert. This officer, a model disciplinarian and a most conscientious worker, felt, like Molière's Harpagon, bathed in a cold sweat at the idea that robbers might force an entry into the house. In the orderly officers' room a locked chest was kept under a table, in which a fairly large sum to meet current expenses was kept. Sometimes Major Moyran, in prey to his sense of responsibility, would suddenly say to Major Thouzelier: "Give me the key of the chest so that I can count the money." And having carefully shut the doors, he would kneel on the carpet and count and recount the sum, under the smiling eyes of his colleague, who in a chaffing tone asked him: "Are you afraid of my looting the treasury?" But Major Moyran took no heed. His verification assuaged his terrors, and once more the catastrophe was averted.

The Commander-in-Chief's simplicity of manner passed the bounds of imagination. One day the Duke of Connaught came to Chantilly to invest some of the officers with decorations. Major de Galbert asked General Joffre if the Duke should be asked to lunch. "Do you think it would please him?" inquired Joffre. And then he added: "Is there a good enough lunch?" He sent for his cook, and, having been assured by him that everything had been arranged, he consented to the invitation. As they went into the dining-room he turned to the Duke and said with great heartiness: "Monseigneur, sit where you like."

He posed willingly to the photographers who pursued him. His entourage, when he found this a nuisance, told him that it was necessary for his popularity, and he was by no means careless of this. In fact, the orderly officer kept a very careful eye on the propa-

ganda undertaken on behalf of their Chief. One day an important illustrated paper had sent a photographer to take him in his office at his writing-table. Somebody suddenly noticed that there were no maps upon the wall. Since the popular imagination could not conceive of a General without maps, a great show of these was hung up to produce the required background, and taken away immediately afterwards.

In spite of his taste for popularity, General Joffre disliked display. Through caution, I think he knew how prompt the civil power and the Members of Parliament were to take fright at the excessive popularity of a soldier. He refused to pass an article entitled "The Commander-in-Chief's Guard," and written by a member of the Intelligence Section. The writer gave this name to the picked regiments who came every month to rest at Chantilly to perform routine duties; but the word "Guard" seemed to Joffre too "pretorian."

He possessed the innate gifts of a politician. André Tardieu declared that he was a born Member of Parliament and would have been in his element in the lobbies. He was besides a convinced Republican, and respected "the representatives of the people," which phrase was to him of real importance. He did not like to hear politicians disparaged in his presence. On Good Friday, 1915, he suddenly discovered that his fare consisted solely of Lenten food. He flew into a rage, and demanded that meat should then and there be added to the menu. "I am a Republican General," he protested. But for all that he had a wide indulgence for the creeds of his officers.

When certain politicians commenced an agitation against him, they found their match. With a mind always on the alert for possible betrayals, he was always perfectly well aware of the plots formed against him. He never revealed himself entirely to his colleagues. Moreover, if the latter, carried away by their zeal, pointed out to him the dangers which threatened him, he pretended not to believe them; but he was always on the look out for squalls. In reality, he

worked alone, seeking to break up the cabals against him by a series of incomprehensible silences, of stubborn denials, made without heat or ulterior motive. He rolled himself into a ball, so to speak. The cleverest intriguer retired in defeat from this stone wall.

His strength, his incontestable authority, was the result of the extreme confidence he possessed. He always believed that victory was imminent, and this idea, which he managed to instil quickly into the minds of the allied rulers, kept them under his influence. In November, 1914, Colonel Pénelon suggested to him some form of helmet or breastplate for the troops. "My friend," he replied, "we shall not have time to make them. I shall tear up the Boches within two months," and he accompanied his words with a significant gesture.

* * * * *

Did this man whose principal asset was the plan of the 1914 offensive really possess the conception of modern war? Did he apply himself early enough to the realities of a struggle in which material was to play so important a rôle? It is very hard to say. In regard to everything Joffre preserved so complete a silence that no one could be sure of the trend of his thoughts. For instance, this is a true story, which shows the difficulty there was in comprehending his real intentions. Lieut.-Colonel Carence is the hero of it. This officer was the head of the War Office Intelligence Department, and came every week to G.Q.G. to co-ordinate measures.

Colonel Carence is known to be one of the most experienced artillery officers of the French Army, and quite fearless in all matters connected with the Arm to which he has devoted his whole life. He was greatly respected at G.Q.G., and his political connections, which he never employed for his own advancement, above all his incisive wit, his rebellious irony, his critical mind, made him the most original Staff officer that could be found. Ever since he had left the Staff College he had the reputation of being a queer character. He had several times wrestled with

Joffre's Third Bureau on the subject of artillery. An advocate of heavy ordnance, long before 1914, he had always agitated at the War Office for the intensive manufacture. One day, early in 1915, desperate at seeing the indifference with which G.Q.G. regarded the problem, he demanded an interview with Joffre.

The latter, who knew him of old and sympathized with his demands, led him into the arbour in the garden of his villa at Chantilly, where he liked to sit after lunch. "I am listening, Carence; tell me about it," he said. So Carence began warmly to plead the cause of the heavy artillery programme, declaring that heavy shell alone could break down the wall of steel against which the infantry must beat in vain unless the guns opened a breach for them. Joffre listened to him in silence for half an hour. When the Colonel had stated and restated his arguments in all their bearings, he became silent in turn. Then Joffre, rising from his seat, tapped him familiarly on the shoulder. "Damn you, Carence," he said, "you always loved artillery. That's very good." And so he dismissed him.

CHAPTER III

The Decline of Joffre

THE INCIDENT OF THE VIEIL HARMAND

MY true apprenticeship began with the attack on the Hartmannsweilerkopf at the end of 1915. On the day of the battle I was sent for by Lieut.-Colonel Gamelin. The Chief of the Third Bureau was pacing his office and rubbing his hands. The brightness of his eyes and the colour in his face betokened his joy. In fact, the success as the first news of it arrived, had confirmed his hopes. We were in possession of the Vieil Harmand, celebrated throughout the world. About a thousand prisoners were reported. This success was considered particularly galling to the Germans, who had made it a point of honour to defend this position. The impression of a striking success had to be conveyed to the public. But there was a shadow upon this success. On the right of the attack a French battalion, owing to a faulty interpretation of their orders, had been surrounded. We had hoped to relieve it; but the terrain was unfavourable, and very little hope now remained. It was anticipated that we should lose four or five hundred men taken prisoners.

To explain the incident to me, Lieut.-Colonel Gamelin kindly showed me on his map the route which the battalion should have followed and the mistake they had made. I was immediately struck with the extraordinary detail involved in the war. That G.Q.G., which commanded three million men, stretched out over an extensive front, could concern itself with the minutiae of such minor attacks reversed all my ideas of the chain of command. No one has any idea of the details to

which G.Q.G. descended. Here the troops were to advance for 150 metres and turn to the right. A little farther on the men were to wait until their comrades on the left were on a level with them before continuing their advance. The area of attack comprised no more than three kilometres of front and three or four hundred metres in depth. The sum-total of our success had been to take possession of some ridges, which must necessarily be always under fire from the enemy. Moreover, the intention was to stop short there ; the operation was not to be construed as the prelude to more important captures. Consequently, people were asking why so small a result was so perseveringly sought.

The enterprise had not yielded all that was expected of it, for one of the battalions engaged, in pushing beyond the limits assigned to it, had become too deeply entangled in the wood, where it had been taken as though in a trap. Thus by a mistake of a hundred metres or so success had been imperilled. It was obvious that the officers of the Staff took a profound interest in these moves. The famous analogy of the game of chess had never been more apparent to me.

With his usual skill, Colonel Gamelin showed me how to lay stress in the *communiqué* upon the brilliant side of the attack, while not exceeding the bounds of moderation and truth. It was a very good lesson for me.

The Germans counter-attacked during the following days. We were compelled to abandon our gains one by one. Finally, the original position was reached. The total of prisoners made by either side was almost equal, with a slight advantage in our favour.

During the whole period that this counter-attack lasted the Chief of the Third Bureau gave me detailed instructions. He was doubtless the originator of the operation, since he took such pains to follow the matter, and was alternately elated and depressed. I could not but admire the ingenuity he displayed in marshalling facts and the true talent for writing he developed. It seemed to me, then, that the art of dispatch-writing was an essential accomplishment for a Staff officer. Later, in different circumstances, I learnt that eloquence

was the second of the gifts that one must have to succeed in this profession.

The attack on the Hartmannsweilerkopf showed the true type of the war of attrition as it was carried on in 1915. It seems that object-lessons were sought rather than definite results.

Colonel Gamelin bore the brunt of this check. From Paris came a flood of criticism. The whole facts relating to Hartmannsweilerkopf were insistently demanded. Without doubt, Parliament and the public began to weary of the war of attrition. Colonel Gamelin anticipated his critics, he asked for and obtained the command of a brigade of *chasseurs à pied* in that very Alsace which had just been so unfavourable to him.

On the day he left he visited the Intelligence Section, ostensibly to take leave of them. In the course of his conversation he took care to refute the charge laid upon the Staff of ignoring the difficulties with which the troops were faced and of waging war on paper. Who could be more in touch with realities than the Staff, with the reports it received and the inspections of its liaison officers? He no doubt thought it a good thing to justify the conduct of the department to men who were journalists. I have always been struck by the admirable spirit of solidarity which bound together Joffre's officers. Among them all there was no one who believed in the maxim, "*Après moi le déluge.*"

At Compiègne, when the appointment of General Pétain was the occasion for the departure of the notorious "Young Turks," one of these sought me out on his departure when I was alone in the office. He asked me to search the registers to see if any important document of the previous reigns still existed. He thought it unnecessary to allow papers of a certain nature to remain at a headquarters which was no longer under the same leadership; and his intention, had he found any, was, he told me, to send them to the Record Office.

Lieut.-Colonel Renouard succeeded Colonel Gamelin as Chief of the Third Bureau. Like his predecessor, he was an officer of the *chasseurs à pied*. Everything

pointed to his appointment ; his prestige as well as his ability, which he took pains to develop by obvious emulation of his predecessors during the latter's *régime*. He was a man in the prime of life, of a lively and brilliant intelligence, full of fire and enthusiasm, with a curious habit of decking his words with witty remarks, which gave his conversation a kind of preciousness surprising enough in a soldier whose quickness of decision was otherwise well known. Few men had such courage of their convictions ; for that was a rare quality in the army, where there was always a dread of assuming responsibility. His subordinates, always sure of being upheld by him, gave of their best under his orders. This man, who in normal times was difficult of access, prompt and bitter in his satire, and not conspicuous for his patience, assumed in critical moments a charm of manner, and a temper both equable and forbearing.

This is again one of the qualities of the true Staff officer : a power over himself and a gift of hiding his feelings. In this matter military education approaches religious education very closely. Never, however desperate the situation might be, did an officer of the Third Bureau worthy of the name admit that things looked black.

Keeping his knowledge to himself, he put a cheerful face on things, for it was his duty to show an example of calmness. To the uninitiated he did not display his fears, as most men do, finding a certain relief in the act. It was even a frequent fault in the Staff officers of the First and Second Bureaux, and in many other services. I have heard these give open expression to their uneasiness. Yet had they belonged to the Third Bureau, they would have said nothing. It is one of the most curious examples of *esprit de corps* and of the strength of mind inspired by a proud tradition and by a consciousness of superiority. It is true that they applied this mastery of self strictly to the military outlook. In other matters, such as political opinions, prospects, ambitions, they showed themselves to be as impressionable as other people.

CHAPTER IV

Joffre and Castelnau

THE Hartmannsweilerkopf affair had aroused the anger of political circles against G.Q.G. The end of 1915 and the beginning of the New Year were unfavourable to the Staff. To military troubles were added internal dissensions. The campaign instituted against General Joffre by certain members of Parliament became more aggressive. Ignorant as I was of these troubles, I was not long in perceiving that at Chantilly one lived in a state of irritation and of constant alarm. Several times I heard it whispered that Joffre went to Paris to defend himself against the attacks of which he was the object and to resist the encroachments of the civil authorities. General Pellé made frequent and jesting allusions to the dangers which threatened him and spoke of making preparations for departure. He was never so light-hearted as in the moments of crisis.

On the return of the Commander-in-Chief it was rumoured that he had once more surrendered to the Parliamentary cabal and the Senatorial Army Commission, where Clemenceau, Doumer and Jeanneney carried on a violent war against him. It was said that he had allowed himself to become entangled little by little until he could no longer resist the politicians.

Sometimes attempts were made to make him abandon this weak attitude. A conspiracy ranged itself round him. His orderly officers, duly primed by their colleagues, took advantage of their walks with him to draw his attention to the danger of abandoning too many of his prerogatives. He had already accepted Ministerial control, which brought a

thousand annoyances with it. Would he now allow the appointment of general officers to be taken from him, as the Minister of War desired? At the first mention of the subject the Commander-in-Chief dismissed the man who had the temerity to broach it. "Damn you, go away and leave me in peace!" he exclaimed roughly. But by degrees the warning took effect, and he had a letter drawn up in which he raised fresh objections to accepting conditions to which he had practically agreed. When these letters were shown him he refused to sign them, and his major-general had them sent off on his own responsibility, an act which brought him much unpopularity.

This show of resistance did not escape his enemies in Paris. The influential members of G.Q.G. felt themselves directly threatened. In the lobbies of the House the "Young Turks" were discussed by name. The liaison officers of the Third Bureau who had occasionally made the generals in the field feel the weight of supreme authority had drawn upon themselves the greatest unpopularity in the army. Many of the commanders had contrived to remain in touch with Paris while at the Front. It was by no means rare for a general to have at his disposal an emissary or a friend who was employed in taking complaints and grievances to high places. The members of Parliament who visited their Headquarters received letters in which all these complaints were set out. They besieged the Minister in their turn. M. Millerand always remained deaf to these charges. But General Gallieni had a keen ear for the abuses reported to him. However, M. Briand's support never failed, if not G.Q.G., at least the Commander-in-Chief.

The examination of the Press, which was one of my duties, led me to draw attention to the articles in *l'Homme Enchaîné*, which strongly supported the diatribes of M. Accambray in the House. My readers can imagine the storm raised by these articles.

General Verraux, in the newly established *l'Œuvre*, was another who gave free rein to his criticism. As a journalist, I was often asked my opinion of Téry.

I was asked why he allowed Verraux to attack the army in this way. The name of Téry had hitherto been held in great respect owing to his great attacks on Jews and politicians. Could it not be made clear to him that he was making a great mistake in employing Verraux? Some even demanded that the new journalist should be imprisoned. For, when attacked by the Press, these men, usually such complete masters of their feelings, who bore without flinching the hardest blows of the enemy, lost all their calmness and sense of proportion.

A persistent rumour spread that General Joffre was to be put in charge of a Supreme Council of the Allies, and that he was about to relinquish the command of the armies of the north and north-east. But as a matter of fact, his power had increased, since, by the Decree of December 3, the troops in the distant theatres of operations had been placed under his orders. In the midst of all this General Castelnau was appointed Chief of the General Staff of the armies. The "Young Turk" factor displayed great dissatisfaction at this appointment.

General Castelnau established himself on the first floor, opposite General Pellé's rooms, in the quarters occupied by the Intelligence Section and the liaison officers of the President of the Republic. Nobody possessed more winning ways than General Castelnau. A jovial, dapper little man, of quick and kindly speech, he was, with his martial bearing and white moustache, the typical French cavalry officer. He was absolutely worshipped by all disinterested persons at G.Q.G. When he entered the hotel, tapping the floor with his stick and looking about him with the mischievous and bright glances of a boy, every one came up to him instinctively, only too pleased to see him. He had the art of lighting up the faces of those he met by a single kindly word, and so making them his admirers in a flash. This little man, so alert and cheerful, radiated honesty and trustworthiness.

But it appeared that even these qualities failed to find a response among important people at G.Q.G.

A silent struggle ensued between them and the new General's staff. When a new chief arrives at a Headquarters he should always come alone, or at most with an orderly officer. If he brings his Staff with him, it is almost certain that friction must ensue between the rest of the Headquarters Staff and the new-comers, which latter, being accustomed to work with their chief, are liable to dispossess the former.

General Castelnau had with him Majors de Bary and Camus. The former, an Alsatian of an old and noble family, was a former officer who had resigned before the war. Tall and heavily built, he seemed as shy as he was bulky. De Bary was a Protestant, a curious fact which showed the broad-mindedness of Castelnau who was an ardent Catholic. On the other hand, Major Camus declared himself to be a Free-Thinker of advanced views, and it was said that he was a Freemason. A third officer, who was rarely to be found in the office, was Second-Lieutenant Laguionie, the manager of the *Magasins du Printemps*. Finally a fourth individual completed the entourage: Father Pierre de Castelnau, a Jesuit and the General's nephew, who acted as his secretary and chaplain. Strongly built, with a round and highly coloured face, framed in a thick black beard, he concealed supreme ability under the guise of a *bon vivant*.

This entourage immediately discovered the hostility of Joffre's Staff; and with that excessive devotion which subordinates so often show to their chief, they set to work to oppose the "Young Turk" faction. If rivalry ensued between highly placed personages in the course of this long struggle, the responsibility lies ultimately with their followers. It is a kind of ambition, for a subordinate to do his best to secure credit for his chief.

This was the case with Major Camus, whose lively ambition and bold spirit could be discerned at a glance. Of wide intelligence and as a sapper well up in the art of fortification, he was the advocate of a thorough consolidation of the Front. He instantly recommended the construction of new trenches in

order to check the enemy's next attacks which he foresaw. Broad, and rather fat, loud voiced and violent tempered, he gave vent to biting criticism of the Third Bureau, which he openly accused of incapacity. His defamations were not limited to his audience at the Hôtel du Grand Condé. Whenever he went to Paris he recounted his grievances to the politicians, who were always delighted to hear ill of the Staff. His firmest support in these circumstances was M. Franklin-Bouillon. Father Pierre, for his part, satisfied his combative temperament and his natural devotion to his uncle—for his ambition was for the family—in regulating the somewhat ill-ordered attacks of Major Camus. Father Pierre had in truth a passion for political intrigue. He loved to learn the opinions of the politicians, not by any means from the religious point of view, for he was a confirmed Liberal. The question for him was simply whether or not they were favourably inclined towards the General. He was also anxious to establish good relations with the Press. He wished to control papers devoted to the cause of his uncle. The *Echo de Paris*, whose manager, M. Henri Simond, was one of General Castelnau's faction, did not conceal its support of him.

General Castelnau had certainly been appointed Chief of the General Staff with a promise of succeeding to the supreme command. Joffre, immediately scenting the danger, set to work to avert the menace. His first step was to insist that General Castelnau should not be appointed by a Decree, which would have made him independent of the Commander-in-Chief, but merely by an order issued by himself, which would make Castelnau his subordinate and not his equal. Meanwhile Joffre's entourage set to work to discourage General Castelnau by displaying their ill will towards him.

They ignored his presence, continued to work as though he were not there, and only passed him on papers when it pleased them. At first it was impossible for Castelnau to see Joffre alone; some devoted officer always found an excuse for making a third. At the

Commander-in-Chief's conferences, his proposals were freely criticized, with more heat than was fitting either from the point of view of discipline or the respect due to a man of his eminence. The General complained to his followers, who took up arms. M. Henri Simond, informed of the attitude of G.Q.G. towards Castelnau, paid a personal visit to M. Briand in order to inform him of these events, of which no doubt he was ignorant. M. Briand was anxious to prove his good faith. During the interview, he called up General Castelnau by telephone. The conversation which ensued under the eyes and as one may say the ears of M. Henri Simond, can be given approximately thus :

" Well, General, are you satisfied with your new post ? "

" Everything is going on as you wish it ? "

" You would like nothing further, no modification of your position ? "

" Good, good, I'm very pleased. That's what I wanted to know."

From the inquiries it was easy to deduce the answers General Castelnau had thought fit to make to the questions of the President of the Council. The General carried too far his patriotism, his respect for the chain of command was too thoroughly imbued with the military spirit, for him to make the slightest complaint which might have entailed serious consequences for his chief. In spite of his restless and bellicose entourage, General Castelnau was of a pacific disposition. He was determined never to lend himself to any intrigue, though Heaven knows enough were going on around him, when his followers, convinced that the interests of France required it, wished to elevate him to the supreme command. While these events were in progress he need only have held out his hand to

grasp it. A violent quarrel with the Commander-in-Chief, which the clumsy and vexatious proceedings of his Staff would have fully justified, would have forced M. Briand, in spite of his will, to cease from supporting General Joffre against the attacks of his enemies. Such loyalty and self-restraint are worthy of admiration.

By a curious coincidence, I happened to be in the waiting-room of General Pellé, which also served as the room of his orderly officers, on the very day that M. Briand spoke to General Castelnau on the telephone. I saw the Major-General cross the room hurriedly, call Castelnau, and say to him, "General, the President of the Council wants you on the telephone." The call, probably by order of General Pellé, had been switched on to the orderly officers' room. General Castelnau picked up the instrument to reply, and I left the room; but General Pellé remained. Was this the conversation overheard by M. Henri Simond? Very likely it was. In any case it is very curious that the exchange, when the President of the Council called up, did not, as it always did, connect him to the instrument in General Castelnau's office.

The dissatisfaction of the Chief of the General Staff, although he declined to express it, was too apparent for there to be any chance of its being unknown at G.Q.G. It was presumably for this reason that the celebrated afternoon walks were taken, to show that a perfect understanding existed between the two chiefs.

Every day, about half-past one, General Castelnau left his villa, which was situated on the lawn, and went to fetch the Commander-in-Chief. Both then made their way in company towards the forest, followed only at a short distance by the two detectives in charge of their safety. Powerful and heavily built, Joffre walked with his hands behind his back, his left leg dragging a little, a habit which provoked the irreverent remark of the chauffeurs at G.Q.G. that "his left-hand cylinder fired badly." Short, robust, and lively, Castelnau hustled along a yard or so ahead, striking at the grass with his stick, and then suddenly made a

half-turn to bring himself back to a level with the Commander-in-Chief. Chatting together they reached a seat at the Portail cross-roads, on which they sat for a quarter of an hour. Very often the Commander-in-Chief, wearied by his walk, dozed quietly, while Castelnau meditated beneath the great trees. This seat is historical. M. Duplaquet the conservator of the Chantilly demesne, has had it repaired and cared for. A commemorative plate, which he had put there after the departure of General Joffre, was surreptitiously removed a few days later by some collector of historical souvenirs. The placing of the plate and the covetousness it aroused are a striking proof of the veneration in which the Commander-in-Chief was held at Chantilly.

When the siesta was over, the two illustrious chiefs retraced their steps. The foresters posted at each cross-road presented arms; the passers-by saluted respectfully and had the pleasure of being greeted in return by General Castelnau with a friendly smile. Then the two parted outside the "Grand Condé." Joffre went home, and Castelnau returned to his office. The officers watched this little scene through the windows. "Under orders," commented the ill-disposed. Informed of this remark, General Castelnau, with his usual irony, replied, "Were it necessary, we would go to bed together."

In fact, nothing was changed, as was proved to me during the battle of Verdun. In April, as I came out of the Department office, where I had been to see a telegram from the army for the purposes of the *communiqué*, I met the General. He asked me with his accustomed cheerfulness, "Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"Have they told you the last news of Verdun, General?" I replied.

And he answered me in these very words. "No, my friend, they tell me nothing."



CHAPTER V

The Battle of Verdun

THE Front had been rather disturbed during the last fortnight of January and the beginning of February. The Germans had replied to our attempt on the Hartmann by violent offensives in the sector of Neuville-Saint-Vaast, in the bend of the Somme where we lost Frise and a whole battalion, and in Champagne. It was guessed that the enemy meditated a major operation to nip our spring campaign in the bud. In fact, since the end of September the French and British Commands had agreed upon a combined offensive north and south of the Somme. Where would the German counter-measures be launched? This question was the subject of discussion between the Second and Third Bureaux.

General Dupont, with an emphasis that carried conviction, declared that the blow would be aimed at Verdun. His intelligence service warned him of continual reinforcements of men and guns in the region north of Montfaucon, in the direction of the Ornes Hills, and in general on both banks of the Meuse. Picked divisions were being massed round Hattonchâtel. He had confirmed the presence of big Austrian howitzers brought from the Eastern Front. Finally, throughout the same area, works had been undertaken by the enemy which left no doubts of his intentions.

But with their habitual scepticism towards the Second Bureau, whom they accused of taking too dramatic a view of the situation, the Third refused to allow themselves to be hypnotized by Verdun. Champagne and Artois were equally possible as

theatres of operations. Did the commanders in these sections not express the same fear of being attacked as those round Verdun? Was it not the habit of all to believe themselves the objective of the enemy? If Artois was hardly favourable, having regard to the time of the year, Champagne on the other hand offered great strategical advantages to the enemy. It was in Champagne that the main attack would develop; the others would prove to be merely feints to deceive the High Command. But if G.Q.G. inclined towards Champagne, the belief in an offensive directed at Verdun was so strong in General Herr's army that many complaints from the Front of the inadequacy of the defensive arrangements reached the War Office. The War Minister was alarmed. An interchange of pointed letters ended in the official statement of G.Q.G. that all precautions had been taken in good time to deal with any hostile effort in that direction. G.Q.G. produced the circular letters in which they had ordered the necessary works to be undertaken. Besides, the liaison officers of the fortification zone of Verdun had taken pains to see that these orders were properly carried out; there was no cause for alarm. Finally, on January 20th, General Castelnau had been to Verdun himself and had given orders for the completion of the work.

As a matter of fact, there was complete confidence. Exhausted by the quarrels which Paris fastened upon them, exasperated by the decree which obliged Staff officers to take their turn in the combatant units (a source of daily recriminations against G.Q.G.), the Staff longed for the attack to take place. "If only those confounded Boches would attack it would at least silence the agitators in Parliament and the War Office." Such was the opinion of the Third Bureau. Surely, if G.Q.G. had not been absolutely certain that every precaution had been taken, it would scarcely have looked forward to the event!

A week before the offensive, were there still sceptics who refused to believe in the attack on Verdun? It is quite likely. But most of those at G.Q.G. who

looked forward to the coming struggle had no longer cares for anything but the banks of the Meuse. Officers from various departments, on the Staff as a rule, who dared not seek information from the Third Bureau, doubting the nature of their welcome there, came every evening to the Intelligence Section to see the reports of the armies. "Well, what's the news? Has the bombardment begun? It won't be delayed much longer you'll find."

And they expended their theories on the maps hanging on the wall for our benefit. Some, who had served at the Front, shook their heads. One of them, Major Allégret, who had been wounded, a man of definite views and extreme good sense, placed his finger on the wooded area from Brabant to Ornes and said, "There is no wire in that sector, I'm very much afraid we shall have bad news." Major Camus prophesied a regrettable incident. I have always found that officers at G.Q.G., when they were not directly interested in any matter and were free from official prejudice, argued with perfect justice. Very often during grave crises there was a wave of opinion at G.Q.G. exactly contrary to that of the Operations Department. But it must be confessed that no one seemed to have an exact idea of the extent which the German offensive was about to take. If there was a surprise, it was in this direction. No one had any suspicion of the forces of which the enemy was about to avail himself or of the method by which he was to apply them.

At last on the eve of the famous day an increase of artillery fire became noticeable on the whole of the Verdun sector. I remarked upon it in the *communiqué* which I submitted to Colonel Renouard. He nodded with the calm and smiling air he assumed when big things were in the wind. Turning to the officers present, he said, "It is coming now, but if the Germans attack at Verdun, what a hornets' nest they'll fall upon!"

The attack began on the 21st, and we lost little ground. The 22nd was harder to withstand. Their

artillery fire reached hitherto unknown dimensions and everything bent before the enemy. Uneasiness manifested itself in the Supreme Command. It was easy to see in the manner of the Department responsible that events were taking them unawares, in spite of the formal assurances they had given.

Colonel Claudel, second in charge of operations, was sent post-haste to report upon events on the spot. He found the situation very grave and was not afraid to say so. So objurgations were poured upon his head, and it was said that he had lost his nerve.

When one is merely an outside observer, it is difficult to judge exactly the force of any particular criticism. One must limit oneself to giving as faithfully as possible the impression one receives without trying to verify it.

The fact that Colonel Claudel immediately formed a gloomy view of the situation was not surprising. Only a confirmed optimist could have helped feeling concerned ; and besides, Colonel Claudel had a habit of expecting the worst. He was a colonial, as conscientious as he was brave ; but his very scrupulousness paralysed his boldness. Few men were more painstaking ; he pondered for a long time over the wording of a note or a report, words never seeming to him capable of conveying the exact truth. In a soldier this critical faculty was surprising. And no doubt this quality was appreciated, for Colonel Claudel remained at G.Q.G. until 1917, in a slightly obscure position, but one whose great importance could be guessed. In my opinion, he should have balanced the brilliant mind which surrounded the High Command. I see him, tall and bald-headed, pacing with an inspired look up and down his office, with his arms crossed, his chin on his hand, buried in the deepest meditations, and weighing the pros and cons at length. He was devoted to Maurice Barrès, many of whose pages he knew by heart and declaimed in a solemn and monotonous voice, tinged with admiration. But Barrès is a bad teacher for those whose business it is to decide

quickly and correctly ; he is not a model for an officer of the General Staff. Voltaire would be better.

While bad news came from the battle-field, a new theory was developed at G.Q.G. If we retreated, what did it matter after all ? Verdun was merely a geographical situation, Verdun was not the whole of France, there must be no false sentiment about a position on the map. The young officers in General Joffre's entourage discussed this theory at dinner, in front of M. Briand who had come at once to confer with the Commander-in-Chief upon the measures to be taken. M. Briand had already heard similar opinions at Paris, when there had been talk of holding the capital ; it is an essentially military argument which usually does not lack weight. But here, as at Paris, the moral consideration outweighed everything. M. Briand said so in so many words, and with some force. General Joffre, in spite of his habitual silence, was entirely of his opinion and declared that he had no intention of withdrawing without fighting.

In the event this determination evinced itself on the 23rd. Brabant having been abandoned by our troops, the order was given to reoccupy it at once. But some hours later we were forced to abandon it again, our advanced position in the village being seriously threatened. On the other hand, the withdrawal from the Woëvre, decided upon on the evening of the 25th, before the enemy attack had been delivered, seems to have been premature. At least, I heard this opinion expressed.

This withdrawal was announced to the public in flowery terms. The form suggested by the Third Bureau showed me once more that a military education involves a training in casuistry. One of the officers of the department, whom I always thought among the cleverest, suggested this phrase : " The advanced posts which we have held in the Woëvre since the battles of last year, and which we kept for observation purposes, have been withdrawn to the foot of the hills of the Meuse for military reasons." Although my trade had accustomed me to the use

of euphemisms, I could not help admiring the skill of this announcement which was designed to appeal to the logical faculty of the French, who are never surprised at anything if only it appears to be explained to them. However, I regret to say, the sentence was slightly altered by substituting for the admirable expression "for military reasons" the words "by the order of the High Command."

The evening *communiqué* of the 23rd was drawn up under dramatic circumstances. M. Berthelot, the head of the office of the President of the Council, had just telephoned by order of the Minister to ask General Pellé to give a full account and to state at its proper worth the extent of the enemy's attack. The public must be prepared for the worst in case the affair developed into a catastrophe. This request showed plainly that neither from G.Q.G. nor the War Office had the Government found any reasons for confidence. As M. Berthelot spoke, General Pellé took down his words. He gave me the paper on which he had written the Government's requests, as well as General von Deimling's Order of the Day, which had been found on prisoners and in which this attack was described as the final offensive which was to lead to peace. The document, properly employed, could be made to show that Germany was exerting a gigantic and unprecedented effort, and that she staked the result of the war upon its success. From which it followed that our retirement need cause no alarm. When, half an hour later, I went down with my version, I found in the office of Colonel Claudel, who was still away, the Major-General, General Janin, Colonel Dupont and Colonel Renouard. Fearing that I might not succeed in producing the required impression, General Pellé had drawn up an alternative *communiqué*. I read the version I had prepared, which was considered too sober. General Pellé's, on the other hand, appeared too alarmist. I had purposely omitted von Deimling's Order of the Day. Its insertion in the *communiqué* would be to break with the tradition to which the public was accustomed and to turn it into

a sort of apologia. It would be as good as saying, "How do you expect us to resist?" It was to be feared that the public would become alarmed at this change of tone and would believe that all was lost. I explained my reasons and suggested that von Deimling's Order should be given to the Press in an abbreviated form as a note.

Opinion being divided, General Pellé went to beg General Castelnau to come and give his decision. The General arrived smiling and good tempered, made a few laughing remarks on this novel sort of literary council of war, and read the two versions. He gave his verdict in favour of the simpler, strengthened the first sentence, inserted the words "as had been foreseen," which sounded a reassuring note, and favoured the view that von Deimling's Order should not be inserted but sent to the papers as a separate note. General Castelnau's attitude showed him to be full of hope, in spite of the bad news, a hope which the rest shared to a lesser degree. •

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When I went to General Joffre to submit the final draft for his approval, I found him in his orderly officers' room. He was sitting astride a chair between the two desks with his arms crossed on its back. The two officers, one on either side of him, telephoned his orders. He listened with his eyes shut, impassive, looking very big. His white hair set off the redness of his face; his knitted brows gave him a fierce expression. He looked like an old lion, at once terrible and calm. Calm he certainly was, and the innocent expression in his blue eyes increased the effect. In moments like these one approached him on tip-toe. He read with a quiet deliberation the documents which were brought for his signature. He held his fountain pen in his hand, and as he read his right hand screwed and unscrewed the cap mechanically. It was a silent language which his entourage understood. If he screwed up the cap the wording did not please him. If he unscrewed it he saw no reason for not signing. He weighed the alternatives on every

occasion. If his final judgment was favourable he wrote his name at the foot of the page in minute letters. If unfavourable, he put his pen back in his pocket and had the document rewritten. On this particular evening he read the *communiqué* carefully and approved it.

During the whole of the critical period of the Verdun drama he never abandoned his serenity of manner. Except on rare occasions he went to bed at ten o'clock and slept peacefully till morning. Once or twice it was necessary to submit certain urgent orders for his approval. The procedure was as follows. After several knocks the General woke, and asked from the other side of the door what was the matter. Then he got out of bed, put on a pair of slippers, and opened the door, which he always locked when he retired. He immediately went back to bed, where he looked over the papers. The matter settled, he locked the door again. On one occasion Major Thouzelier discovered, ten minutes after leaving the Commander-in-Chief's room, that he had left on the table by the bed a diagram which was to be attached to the message being sent to the Army. He went back, hoping that the General would not have gone to sleep again, but contrary to his expectations Joffre had already fallen into a deep sleep.

This power of sleep became legendary in Paris, thanks to M. Etienne. During the Verdun offensive, the ex-Minister, a personal friend of the Commander-in-Chief, telephoned to G.Q.G. every evening about eleven o'clock for news of the day's events. He always found one of the orderly officers at the end of the wire.

"Well, how are things?" inquired M. Etienne. "What does the General say?"

"The General is asleep," was the invariable reply.

"Capital!" exclaimed M. Etienne, completely reassured. "If things were going badly he would not sleep."

It follows from all these things seen and heard that, if the Verdun attack greatly surprised the Headquarters Staff by its extent, its violence, and its first

overpowering results, and if it caused them consternation, it did not succeed in disturbing the Commander-in-Chief. There is no doubt that he must be credited with the excellent counter-measures which were taken. He rejected all panic measures, calmed the outside world and re-established confidence.

Among the many stories which were current, there is one which deserves quotation, since it deals with the part played by General Castelnau at this juncture. This is exactly how things happened.

In the evening of February 24th, about half-past eight, as a result of information received from the G.O.C. Central Army Group, expressing the imperative necessity of evacuating the Woëvre, Generals Castelnau, Pellé and Janin, with General Renouard, went to see Joffre to submit the matter to him and to obtain a decision. General Castelnau proposed to transfer to Verdun the Second Army, commanded by Pétain, whose Staff had not suffered from the changes due to the decree ordering the exchange of Staff officers and was consequently the most efficient. The suggestion was adopted. As at that time the exact situation was uncertain, it was decided that the point of concentration should be on the left bank of the Meuse. The Headquarters of the Second Army was to be at Bar-le-Duc. The eventual task of this army, until further information should be obtained, was to collect units which could be drawn back upon the left and prevent the enemy crossing the river. At eleven o'clock General Castelnau came back to the office, having seen further reports, and telephoned to the orderly officer on duty to ask if the Commander-in-Chief was in his room. On hearing that he was, he asked him to go and request Joffre to authorize him to go to Verdun in order to take such steps as the situation demanded. The Commander-in-Chief replied that he did so authorize him, and endowed him with "full powers."

General Castelnau set out at half-past twelve. He made a short stay at Avize, the Headquarters of the Central Army Group, to hear the latest reports and

to issue a preliminary order announcing his arrival and commanding that a stand should be made on the right bank. Having arrived at Verdun about eight o'clock, he made his way to the Bevaux quarter on the right bank and issued the necessary instructions to the commanders of the larger units. As the result of discussing the situation with them he came to the conclusion that the defence of the Verdun Fortified Zone should be placed in the hands of the Second Army Commander.

Having exact information as to General Pétain's route to Bar-le-Duc, he directed him, in a telephone message sent to Chalons, to come at once by the shortest route to Souilly, where he met him about five o'clock in the afternoon.

Pétain, having received the order from G.Q.G., suggested by Castelnau, left Noailles for Chantilly, where he arrived on the 25th. It has been said and even placed on record that Pétain, avoiding Chantilly, passed through Paris and saw the War Minister. This is not so. Pétain went to Chantilly to obtain his orders and proceeded direct to Chalons, where he lunched with General Gouraud. He then made straight for Souilly, where he met General Castelnau.

Major Serrigny, who accompanied General Pétain, pays unsolicited tribute to the Olympian calm of the Commander-in-Chief during the interview between the two. The conversation closed by Joffre saying, "Well, my friend, now you are easy in your mind." In the circumstances the remark sounded comic; but from the lips of Joffre this merely meant, "Now you know what you have to do." It seemed natural to the Commander-in-Chief that one should be easy in mind when one knew one's duty.

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The news of the capture of Fort Douaumont became known through the sensational German *communiqué* of the 26th, and caused utter consternation. The Germans declared that they "had taken by storm" Fort 25, in the afternoon. No one could understand how this had happened, as that very morning an

operation in which part of the Twentieth Corps were involved had begun to take a favourable turn. Besides, the reports from the armies made no mention of the matter. Upon information being sought, the event unfortunately proved to be true; but no one knew exactly how it had taken place. However, we could not keep silent much longer.

In the complete ignorance in which we were plunged at Chantilly as to how the capture of the fort had taken place, we had in the ensuing *communiqué* of the 26th, to hazard a version of the attack which it was a thousand to one would be true. This is the *communiqué* as it appeared in the papers.

“A fierce struggle took place round Fort Douaumont, which is an advanced work of the old defences of Verdun. The position carried by the enemy this morning, after several fruitless assaults which involved them in very heavy losses, has been since reached and passed by our troops, all the enemies’ endeavours having failed to drive them back.” This was a version at the same time definite and vague, which was ambiguous and might be taken to mean, among other things, that the fort had been retaken. It occurred to nobody that the enemy had occupied it without firing a shot.

As a matter of fact, the report of the 26th from the Army at eight o’clock in the evening, contained merely the words “Uncertain situation at Douaumont. Our forces have reached the fort and consolidated themselves in the barbed wire.” A further message added that we had pushed beyond the fort to left and right.

Now the truth, as revealed by an inquiry, was this.

During a relief of the units engaged in the neighbourhood of the fort, nobody had concerned themselves with the conditions within it, there being no orders issued on the subject. The fort had remained in charge of an independent battery commander and a few men. A party of Brandenburgers, seeing the gate open, had slipped into the fort and taken prisoners the handful of men they found there. Then the sensational news was announced to the world. Very

shortly afterwards the French troops established on the surrounding slopes found to their amazement that they were being fired upon from the fort. The presence of the battery commander enabled the enemy to announce that the commander of the fort had been taken prisoner. Thus G.Q.G. came to the conclusion that the fort had been lost after a severe struggle.

The wording of the *communiqué* of the 26th caused everybody to believe that the fort was half-surrounded. It was a rash statement. The Army report had not said as much; it would have been better to reproduce the wording of the latter, which I have quoted above. The Press, as usual, emphasized the statement. The military experts deduced from this "half surrounding" that the Brandenburgers, shut up in the fort, would shortly be compelled to surrender. After a few days they began to ask, not uncritically, how it was that the garrison, left without food, had not yet surrendered, especially since no change in the situation had been announced. It was found necessary to beg them, through the Press Bureau, to abandon this subject of encirclement.

The truth was that there was no question of a siege. We had been compelled by the terrible fire of the enemy to withdraw our troops gradually to the rear. Besides, the Germans had dug a communication trench on the northern side of the work leading to their own lines. This incident proved to us how dangerous it was in a *communiqué* to arouse hopes which were not certain of being realized.

During this period General Pellé, realizing that it was necessary at all costs to explain the details of the struggle to France and to the world at large, gave every facility to the Intelligence Section. Lieutenant Tessan, an information officer, was sent on a visit to the Second Army. He telephoned every day direct to G.Q.G. a story of the fighting which was sent on to the Press that evening. Second-Lieutenant Madelin and later Captain Henry Bordeaux went subsequently to assist in this duty. Through them our magnificent resistance became known in all its details, and the

terrible losses of the attackers revealed with a persistence which exasperated the enemy.

In the same way a telegraphic *résumé* of the situation was sent every evening to our military attachés. Further, none of the false and fantastic statements of the German *communiqués* remained unanswered. The Eiffel Tower broadcasted contradictions drawn up in the strongest terms which countered the enemy propaganda. Sometimes the tone of the argument became almost Homeric in its liveliness of invective. General Pellé, with his marvellous clearness and tireless activity, had an ear for everything, urged on his colleagues, and took part himself in the wireless argument, while carrying on all the time his overpowering daily task.

All this time the state of the Third Bureau was not devoid of interest. It presented the appearance of a well-organized General Staff. Each officer had his defined sphere. One was concerned with the movements of troops, and ordered by telephone the concentration of reserve divisions upon one or other point of the front. Another dealt with the movements of batteries, and redistributed guns to positions where they could be used more effectively. I remember a column of ninety kilometres long being set in motion by a single word. The crossing of columns had to be foreseen, their halts determined, the routes of troops who might impede them altered. Other officers, in touch with the Supply Branch, controlled rations, camps, and transport services. General Ragueneau, the chief of the Supply Branch, in collaboration with Major Girard, chief of the Motor Transport Section, organized the admirable service of motor-lorries which eventually supplied the whole requirements of the Verdun army for six months. General Ragueneau increased his feats of ability with the help of his assistant, Colonel Payot, a man of desperate energy and tyrannical authority. All these men worked night and day, improving the improvised arrangements made in the early days by ingenuity and toil, while the Parliamentary Commissions complained with reason that

this threatened sector had been left so long with only a narrow-gauge railway and a branch line under hostile artillery fire, without any attempt being made to improve matters. It is hard to imagine all the initiative, flexibility, and intelligence shown by the French General Staff at such a time. It will be understood that such duties call for specialists accustomed to this kind of work. The slightest error in organization will compromise the result of an operation, for the troops cannot wait. Rations, munitions, and supplies must all be at their destination when they are wanted.

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One of the most surprising features in the battle of Verdun was the persistence with which the Germans pressed their attacks. Up till then, after the violence of the initial attacks, the severity of the struggle had always diminished, and ceased completely, after a period of a fortnight or a month at most. But, determined to capture the fortress at all costs, the Germans merely increased their efforts. On March 6th they developed an attack on the left bank, which since February 21st they had heavily bombarded.

This extension of the front of the attack had been expected by us, and the enemy consequently found himself opposed by an organized resistance. March 7th and 8th were especially advantageous to us. The Germans, who had previously occupied the Bois des Corbeaux, were driven from it by our successful counter-attacks. On the 9th they attacked both banks at once. In spite of the most violent efforts, kept up all day, they were everywhere driven back with great loss. A triumphant wireless message announced their defeat to a world which had been aroused by our unshaken resistance. In accordance with our plan, we laid stress upon the German losses.

In fact, not a day passed that the *communiqué*, with a regularity which began to irritate the purists of the Press Bureau at the War Office, did not credit the Germans, not without a show of reason, with heavy losses, extremely heavy losses; and did not

speak of "bloody sacrifices," of "heaps of dead bodies," of "hecatombs." In the same way the wireless service made unceasing use of the figures of the Verdun Staff, whose chief, Major de Cointet, had devised a method of calculating the German losses which obviously gave marvellous results. Every fortnight the total increased by a hundred thousand or thereabouts. These losses of 300,000, 400,000, 500,000 men put forward on every occasion, resolved into daily, weekly, monthly losses, repeated in every possible form, produced a startling effect. Our formulæ varied but little. "According to prisoners' statements, the German losses in the course of the attack have been considerable. . . ." "It is confirmed that the losses . . ." "The enemy, exhausted by his losses, has not renewed the attack. . . ." Certain expressions, which had to be abandoned later as they had been used too freely, were employed every day. "Under the fire of our artillery and machine-guns— Mowed down by our artillery and machine-gun fire . . ." This constant repetition impressed neutrals and even Germany, and helped to give our enemies an impression of fearful losses, despite the denials of the Nauen station which tried vainly to remove the bad impression of our constant repetitions.

Meanwhile the situation became worse on March 10th. The enemy at the end of the day pushed an attack home on Fort Vaux and succeeded in taking up a position among the barbed wire. In spite of constant attacks they were not able to gain definite possession of the fort until June 7th; but this desperate effort was made in order to counteract a mistake they had made on the preceding day. On March 9th had occurred the false statement of the capture of Fort Vaux. On that day, at four o'clock in the evening, G.Q.G. wireless telephoned frantically to the Major-General that the Nauen service, whose words it translated, had announced in pompous terms the capture of Fort Vaux. The news spread like lightning through the hotel. Already Paris, informed by the Eiffel Tower, was feverishly demanding an explanation.

The most profound surprise seized the Third Bureau. It had been a comparatively quiet day. The morning report dealt only with trifles. It seemed impossible that the Army would not have immediately notified an unexpected attack by the enemy. The Staff at Souilly, promptly interrogated by telephone, displayed as much amazement as G.Q.G. An officer was sent forthwith to report events on the spot. At six o'clock the reply came. The fort was not only in our hands, but had not been even attacked. We conjectured vainly as to the motives which could have induced the enemy High Command to issue the false news. Our denial could not wait, and all night wireless messages were sent to our military attachés. I kept as a souvenir the indignant draft which General Pellé wrote in his own hand in reply to the lie. This is it.

"The German wireless of March 9th states that in the course of a brilliant night attack the Posen reserve regiments nos. 6 and 19, under the command of Infantry-General von Guretzki-Cornitz, carried by assault the armoured fort of Vaux as well as many neighbouring fortifications.

"This is utterly false. At the very time to-day that the wireless was conveying the message an officer of the French General Staff entered the fort of Vaux, and ascertained that the fort had not been attacked and that the garrison was quietly at its post."

The next day, the Germans, who had discovered their mistake, endeavoured with their usual clumsiness to put matters right. They calmly declared that the French "as a result of a series of desperate attacks which had cost them severe losses" had regained possession of the fort. This incident gives some idea of the misstatements contained in the German *communiqué*.

It is impossible to form any idea of the constant alarms caused to us by these divergencies from the truth. During the whole of the Verdun period a certain number of frequenters of the lobbies awaited the arrival of the Nauen messages at the Palais-

Bourbon in order to learn its contents and spread the alarm. G.Q.G. protested in vain against this practice, and had the greatest difficulty in maintaining that it was hiding nothing. By some curious aberration, these men treated the Nauen messages as articles of faith. The Press Bureau at the War Office was reduced to asking almost daily for official statements to put an end to rumours. It is amazing that the Government should not have taken energetic measures to put an end to this state of things. The officers of the Press Bureau had the artlessness to tell us, when they mentioned the rumours which were about, that "public opinion is greatly disturbed by this Nauen statement" as though the country was of the same mind as this handful of alarmists.

To return to Fort Vaux. A possible explanation of the original mistake of the Germans was given later by General Nivelle, who was in command of that sector. To the west of Fort Vaux was a little redoubt which the Germans that day tried to carry by surprise with a small force. Our troops repulsed them and took a few prisoners who were immediately taken into the fort. An enemy observer, seeing men in field-grey uniform crossing the glacis, thought that the fort had been taken and fired a special rocket. The news reached German G.Q.G., from whence it was immediately issued without verification.

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The attacks upon Mort-Homme provided another typical example of the methods employed by the enemy to instil doubts into men's minds. Possibly on account of its ill-omened name, public opinion in both countries attached enormous importance to this position. "Shall we hold Mort-Homme?" was for a month the principal topic of the French journalists. The heights of Mort-Homme, lying north-west by south-east, possessed two summits, marked on the $\frac{1}{80,000}$ map as Hills 265 and 295. On March 21st the Germans, as soon as they had set foot upon Hill 265, announced triumphantly, as usual, that they were masters of Mort-Homme. We replied with an

official denial. Mort-Homme had demonstrably two crests, and as we held the highest, they could not claim to occupy the heights. The enemy persisted in his statements, and declared that he had been in occupation of Hill 295 for several days. We replied that this was impossible, since Hill 295 was to the south of Hill 265, and that they themselves stated that their line passed along the crest of Hill 265. Then the Germans took it into their heads to publish in their Rheinland papers a portion of the map in which Hill 265 was shown south of Hill 295. It need hardly be said that we replied with reproductions of the true map. The result of this was that the enemy, when he finally took Hill 295, was compelled to leave the fact unannounced. And for our own part we were careful to say nothing.

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In spite of the drama enacted so bloodily on the Verdun front and to which no end could be seen, quiet reigned among the General Staff, except in days of extreme danger. Our passive attitude—which, by the way, masked the preparations for the battle of the Somme—seemed to content us since the eventual result of these fruitless attacks could only be to cause wastage in the enemy's forces. Unbounded hopes were built upon this wastage.

It is indeed curious to relate that on this occasion the Staff cherished ideas which it could certainly not have deduced from the lessons of previous wars, since never before had a similar struggle been witnessed, where nations employed all their strength. To tell the truth, these ideas were not adequate to the problem which we had to solve. They were mostly out of date, and were to some extent archaic, and it was only by a process of provisional generalization that our officers could apply them to existing circumstances. Truly it would not be unjust to them to suggest that they lacked imagination. With strange conservatism, they endeavoured to make their Staff College handbooks fit in with the new facts which were revealed to us. One wished that some innovating

genius could sweep away all this useless nonsense and impart the eternal spirit of those great leaders, could destroy the empty theories which like good pupils they strove to follow exactly. A treatise might be written upon the logic of G.Q.G., that military Port-Royal. Its peculiar syllogisms appealed to the public, which soon became accustomed to them. At first I followed them with some difficulty, for they emanated from brains which did not reason in the same way as my own. One day, for example, I received the following note from General Dupont, who had composed it at the request of the Third Bureau. I quote it word for word.

“The Third Bureau asks that when the enemy’s XXII regiment arrives on the Verdun front, it should be conveyed to the opinion of neutrals and military attachés that it is a favourable sign. The following form is suggested: ‘While Joffre’s strategic reserves are still stationed in rear of the whole front at railway centres suitable for rapid concentration, we notice the appearance on the German front of attack, besides the troops drawn from the front between the Oise and Belfort, those belonging to reserves which have been carefully husbanded, and which William’s G.H.Q. must expend with regret!’

“It would be an opportunity of accustoming the opinion both of the neutrals and the military attachés, and perhaps also of the Allies, to judge the success of operations by the effort expended by the enemy in achieving very small results.”

If I remember aright the significance of this paper on reading it again now, a great reason for hope was to be drawn from the fact that the enemy had employed a unit of their strategic reserves in the Verdun battle, while ours remained intact. This static outlook applied to a war between nations, in which each belligerent employed the whole resources of his country, is an amazing thing in an Operations Department during the third year of the war. It was just as though we were dealing with an ordinary battle, in which the employment of reserves by one army leads the

other army to expect a rapid victory. But Joffre's Staff were blinded by their illusion, that the end of the war would come through the attrition of the enemy. During this same Verdun offensive, General Pellé, usually so far-seeing, wrote with his own hand this propaganda thesis, which he, in common with the whole of G.Q.G., considered as strong as iron.

"The present offensive eats up the active troops of the enemy, whose man-power is becoming exhausted. We have discovered that the 1916 class is already at the Front. The 1917 class alone remains, and this is beginning to be called up together with third-class elements (men above 45 and those previously rejected). In a few weeks, the German troops, exhausted by this effort, will find themselves confronted by the whole of the Allied troops (ten millions against six millions)."

When one thinks that this took place during the early months of 1916, and that at that time there was no question of the participation of America, one is amazed. By some curious aberration, they thought only of the wastage of the enemy; it appeared to them that our own resources were proof against it. General Nivelle shared the same ideas. The result was seen in 1917.

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I reproduce in connection with the battle of Verdun one of the many documents drawn up at G.Q.G. and destined either for the eyes of the Parliamentary Commissions or to form material for propaganda articles. Read at this interval it cannot fail to produce some slight astonishment. It is dated March 18th, 1916, and is headed "General Headquarters of the Northern and North-Eastern Armies, General Staff, Operations Department."

"As a result of the operations in Artois and Champagne, the Commander-in-Chief decided that the Army Groups should momentarily establish themselves in positions of defence where they could stop any hostile offensive (even should the enemy attack in force with the aid of troops taken from other fronts).

"For this purpose local reserves have been instituted to allow of the immediate launching of counter-attacks.

"The reserves of the Army and Army Groups have been placed so as to admit of their rapid concentration upon threatened points (camping grounds chosen in accordance with this; entrainments prepared so that they may be carried out upon telegraphic instructions; an Army Staff has been set aside with a view to eventual employment at the Front).

"In the case of the Verdun area particularly, the necessary procedure had been carried out long since to admit of the maintenance of important forces in this sector, even under conditions which rendered the Chalons-Verdun railway unavailable.

"This organization was put to the test on the occasion of the Woëvre operations in February, 1915. We have only to perfect it (improvement of the local railway Bar-le-Duc-Verdun, increased employment of mechanical transport).

"It has given every satisfaction."

This is the thesis of the Operations Department in all its simplicity. So presumably it is not true that we were in the least taken by surprise when the Germans attacked on February 21st; all the troops were in place, the local railway served the required purpose, the motor transport supply routes were ready!

As for the secret debates in Parliament, the thousand recorded statements, the consultations of Gallieni with G.Q.G., and finally the evidence of our own eyes—all these things simply did not exist! The General Staff had arranged everything, had foreseen everything, and its satisfaction was complete!

This is how history will be written in fifty years' time, when, eyewitnesses being dead, conscientious historians, wishing to apply to the best sources, will study the archives of the General Staff.

Let us warn them now. They must be put on their guard against that great business of whittling down

the truth, which I saw accomplished day by day before my very eyes. And if they do not take warning, they will cause us to doubt history altogether. When I see an historian as well informed as Louis Madelin gravely consulting official archives, seeking and opening with profound reverence the registers of G.Q.G., and going to the extent of believing them without trying to check them, I cannot help being disillusioned. The General Staff was lucky in having at hand a very talented historian to maintain its arguments in the face of the world. Louis Madelin salves his conscience perhaps by the thought that his work was useful to France. He is mistaken. Truth alone is useful to a country. When he sees the same mistakes being repeated, he will perhaps regret his faithfulness and his spirit of obedience. It is a pity that an historian should be mobilized; something of the second-lieutenant remains with him, obedience to his superiors without comment or complaint. And, alas, are not all the rest, with rare exceptions, in similar case?

When I think that the truth of the Nivelle business and the attack of April 16th will be sought in the report drawn up by the three military investigators so imprudently nominated by M. Painlevé, I can only shudder. Foch, Gouraud, and Brugère, having consulted all the documents and heard all the evidence, reached as their conclusion a magnificent "*satisfecit*," with just a shadow of a reproach for his imprudence. They commended "boldness," when it was in reality culpable temerity and scandalous ignorance. "No professional faults," they say, as though it were not a very terrible fault for a general to meet with such a check that it very nearly discouraged the French Army for ever. Is it not a sad thought that Foch, Gouraud, and Brugère should have felt bound to act thus? I shall certainly not be niggardly in my praise of the General Staff in the present book, as you have already seen; but as for accepting without critical examination the official records of the time of Joffre and Nivelle, never! Too many of them have passed through my hands for me not to be deter-

mined on this point. I have written too many of them myself! When Pétain came, a comparative sincerity prevailed; partly because justifications were generally suppressed, Pétain being content with orders and dispatches as future sources of history. But for all that his presence could not put a stop to the intrigue of the departments and the play of the old military jealousies. He would have had to change the very natures of his Staff officers; and no man could achieve that!

One evening at G.Q.G. at Chantilly I was shown the famous order of the Marne, which directed that a stand should be made towards the north, written entirely in Colonel Gamelin's writing and signed Joffre. A magnificent piece of history, inscribed on red paper! At last I was to know who could claim the honour and the glory of having said: "We shall stop there, we shall be victorious on such a spot." A cruel deception! The famous order bore three different dates written one over the other. We shall not learn the truth from it!

CHAPTER VI

The Battle of the Somme

WHILE the battle of Verdun dragged on, the Operations Department of G.Q.G., with a perseverance which merits praise, continued the preparations for the Somme offensive. Colonel Renouard had from the earliest days held that the only way of relieving Verdun was to attack the Germans at some other point on the front. Unhappily, the necessity which General Pétain found for meeting the enemy's attacks with new and fresh troops hindered the plans of G.Q.G. The reserves kept in hand for the coming offensive were slowly absorbed by the battle of Verdun. At the same time, the method of reliefs devised by General Pétain kept the divisions under fire for the shortest possible time. By ensuring that they should suffer relatively slight losses, the General preserved the morale of his troops. Every division which was sent to the attack knew that immediately after its effort had been made it would be withdrawn from the line. But this procedure meant the employment of a large number of divisions. It followed that as early as March 25th General Pétain had under his command twenty-five divisions in the Second Army and six divisions in the Third. The figure of forty French divisions, originally decided upon for the Somme offensive, decreased from day to day. This nibbling was increased by subsequent events.

G.Q.G. tried to put the brake on this proceeding. They made representations to General Pétain to induce him to change his methods. He declined to do so, having certainly good reasons which were justified by success. Further, considerable delays on the part of the

English in making their preparations left the Germans free to redouble their efforts before Verdun. It was impossible to risk a weakening of the defence lest Verdun should fall into the enemy's hands before the Somme battle was developed. All the advantages of our resistance, particularly the moral advantages, would have been thrown away, even had we achieved a brilliant victory on the Somme. One may believe that without the energy of General Pétain, who stood firm, demanded divisions, and did not fear, so it is said, to apply to the Government when G.Q.G. showed signs of opposing him, we should certainly have lost the fortress. It must be remembered that on July 13th, when the Somme battle had been in progress for nearly two weeks, a desperate effort on the part of the Germans carried them as far as Fort Souville. They were not far from their goal.

But for all that the Operations Department persisted in blaming General Pétain. They complained of his demands and accused him of having disorganized the coming battle on the Somme. The great success which we achieved on the south side of the river, where for the first three days of the battle the surprise had been complete, proved conclusively, according to Colonel Renouard, that we should have won a great victory had we been able to employ thirty divisions instead of ten. In his opinion it would have led to a complete break-through, and after that, what would the loss of Verdun have mattered!

Colonel Buat, who had been appointed Assistant Director of Operations in March, and had, with his accustomed energy and clearness of thought, set to work to prepare for the Somme battle, found a way of ending this haggling by having fifty-three divisions assigned to General Pétain on May 9th, with complete freedom on the General's part to dispose of them.

No doubt these complaints increased the hostility of the Operations Department towards General Pétain, a hostility which played a large part in keeping the victor of Verdun from the succession to Commander-in-Chief when Joffre vacated that post.

The problem thus raised is evidently of great interest. But my own belief is that Pétain was right to act as he did. It was of vital importance to hold Verdun, for in the German check before the fortress was our true victory. Could it be guaranteed that the battle of the Somme, even developed to the full, would result in the decisive victory? I do not think so. We were not sufficiently well equipped to undertake the breakthrough which must be the prelude to pursuit. Besides, our method of exploiting our success was defective. Had we, indeed, a method? A victory pushed to its furthest lengths would have enabled us to gain the line of the Somme, no more. This would not have prevented the English on our left from losing, as they did on the night of July 1st-2nd, a great part of the ground gained. A gain of six to eight kilometres in depth would not have compensated for the loss of Verdun. In the light of subsequent events, history will approve of General Pétain's action. And who knows if, had Verdun fallen before July 1st, we should have been able to open the battle of the Somme under similar conditions? It must not be forgotten that powerful German reserves of troops and material were held before Verdun, and were not available to resist the attack of July 1st.

Every incident of the war has shown that victory is the fruit of collaboration. Men of different minds and temperaments can contrive to combine their ideas for the greatest good of the country, provided that a supreme chief knows how to co-ordinate their efforts and not to paralyse them. Colonel Renouard's great services must not be underestimated. Pétain's temerity had the credit of having brought off a defensive victory at Verdun, but it is to Colonel Renouard's stubborn energy that we owe the completion of it by an offensive victory which finally relieved the town.

The Chief of the Operations Department never abandoned his scheme, even at the most critical moments when it seemed that all was lost at Verdun. At these times he was submitted to considerable

pressure to secure the launching of the offensive at once without waiting for the English, or before they were sufficiently ready. Everywhere it was said that this butchery could not be indefinitely prolonged. The nervousness of the Press was extreme. What! For three months the Germans had hurled all their forces at us, wearing out our reserves, and our Allies looked on at the massacre without moving! It seemed monstrous. A weaker man could not have withstood this demand. It must be added that pressing requests came from the Second Army, which demanded a diversion on any part of the front for the purpose of its relief.

But Colonel Renouard meant to develop a continued battle and not attempt a diversion which must be short-lived. To achieve this result, it was necessary that the British should have all their material ready; enormous works had to be undertaken and a vast quantity of material concentrated on the front of attack. Besides, it had been agreed with our Allies that the attack should take place on July 1st; they could not be ready before that date, and to induce them to move earlier would be to risk the success of the enterprise. In short, on July 1st, as had been arranged since December, 1915, our troops attacked, when the enemy thought us incapable of such an effort and reckoned upon only having to resist our Allies.

Once more credit must be given to General Joffre, whose magnificent impassiveness allowed the Operations Department and its Chief to carry through their schemes to their conclusion.

The Commander-in-Chief had followed all the preparations very closely. As his custom was, he checked the lists of reserves of munitions which had been submitted to him, verifying the totals to assure himself that no error had crept in. The results of the morning's work were excellent. The General seemed quite sprightly and more loquacious than usual. At such times he joked freely at his meals, and said, for instance: "The Boches must be getting quite upset." But he ordered that the early successes should be

very prudently announced. In the afternoon he left for Foch's headquarters, and returned in the evening, no less satisfied but persistent in his moderate attitude. He was anxious that the *communiqué* should not mention the whole of our gains, and said that we must reserve some of the good news for next day. The success south of the Somme exceeded all our expectations. Our troops had taken the enemy by surprise and swept away every obstacle. So greatly shaken was the enemy that it would seem that we should reach the Somme on the following day. July 2nd was an equally favourable day for the French Army. Unfortunately, the hostile counter-attacks, very strongly pushed, had succeeded in driving our Allies back at several points. The offensive having taken a northeasterly direction, towards Cambrai, we could not think of advancing without the support of the British on our left, and we had to wait for them.

At this juncture General Castelnau, according to what I heard from one of his orderly officers, proposed a modification of the original plan. A surprise having been achieved in the French zone of attack, we should profit by it by turning definitely to the right those of our troops who were proceeding eastward south of the Somme. We should thus take in the rear the German divisions echeloned in the Chaulnes salient in front of the Tenth Army: a movement which might compel the enemy to an extensive withdrawal. In any case, we could take 50,000 prisoners, while the Tenth Army, which was to come into action some days later on the right of the Sixth, by acting immediately, would grapple the enemy in front while part of the Sixth Army threatened his rear. In the confusion in which the Germans found themselves on July 3rd and 4th, it seems that the turning movement would then have been possible. The information from the Sixth Army showed us that we only had scattered units in front of us on the south of the Somme, as witness the fact that a regiment carried away by the ardour of pursuit on the 4th entered Barleux, going beyond the objectives assigned to it. The system of limited objectives was

in high favour, and though Barleux was not defended, a formal order compelled the regiment to withdraw to the west of the village. What was possible on that day was no longer so on the morrow, and still less on the following days. During the night the enemy hastily dug trenches and placed machine-gun battalions on the left bank of the Somme. Barleux, although fiercely attacked, could not be retaken. Henceforth a barrier was raised before us, which stopped all further progress southward.

General Castelnau's scheme was not adopted. It is certainly a delicate business in a big offensive, of which the details have been meticulously drawn up in conjunction with an allied army, to upset established arrangements. Besides, the turning movement in question, in spite of the prospects of immediate success it offered, did not possess the importance of the offensive in the Cambrai direction, which aimed at cutting the enemy's main lines of communication. It could have been nothing but a happy expedient. At the same time, this scheme might have achieved more at a blow than the long and desperate battle of the Somme, which, after the rapid advance of the earlier days, only progressed step by step. But other experiences were required before the French command learnt the ineffectual nature of battles of attrition in which the factor of surprise was ruled out.

The struggle went on with the methodical slowness of which the Germans had shown us an example for four months at Verdun, but with a more skilfully applied use of force and more carefully thought out manœuvres.

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In spite of the continual success which the Franco-British troops gained during July, it was obvious that the battle would have no decisive result. A break-through was no longer hoped for. At the rate at which we advanced, we could not get sufficiently close to the lines of communication which supplied the enemy front to cut them and compel the enemy to a voluntary retreat. The objective on each occasion

was some dominant position, some observation post which would give us command of a wide expanse of ground. Once the objective was gained, the advance slackened.

Great hopes, however, were raised by the taking of Bouchavesnes. The capture of the village had been so rapidly carried out that the enemy, taken at a disadvantage, found himself without defensive works in bare country, having nothing to oppose to us but scattered units collected in haste from neighbouring divisions. News came from the Army that evening which allowed of high hopes. The Information Officer attached to the Sixth Army, Lieutenant de Brinon, told the Intelligence Section that the troops were full of enthusiasm. The break-through was proclaimed; it was believed that on the morrow the pursuit would begin. Alas, as always happened, the units required to exploit the breach could not be brought up quickly enough. In this broken country, cut up by the bombardment, it was impossible to progress with the necessary rapidity.

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The Tenth Army had been timed to take part in the operation on July 20th. The Operations Department based great hopes upon this extension of the front and showed great confidence in the abilities of General Micheler, who commanded the Tenth Army. I had never met this general, but the way in which I heard him spoken of made me very anxious to make his acquaintance. He came to G.Q.G. before the beginning of the Somme battle, and was received with marked respect. The deference with which he was treated by the officers of the Operations Department gave me the impression that this general must certainly be one of the great figures of the war. I mentioned this to the Information officer attached to the Army, Lieutenant de Brinon, who by no means confirmed it. His description of General Micheler was a curious one, and later I was able to confirm the correctness of his estimate. According to him, the Commander of the Tenth Army was able but

vacillating, subject to fluctuations of mind which often made him cancel his decisions. His judgment was marred by extreme nervousness. A former Chief of Staff to Sarrail, he seemed to have acquired from the latter a keen taste for politics and a desire to make a party for himself. But now and then, the Staff officer in him prevailing, he inveighed fiercely against the civil power. His remarkable facility of speech led him to speak disparagingly in public of people whom a few days before he had lauded to the skies. Nothing could be more astonishing than his indiscretions at meal-times, which frequently made his officers most uncomfortable. He gained in consequence a reputation for ambition and of changing his opinion in accordance with his interests. A reputation, in fact, undeserved, since he was a sincere man who suffered from alternating moods.

On the eve of an operation he swung between the extremes of hope and despair, as his mind dwelt on the strong or weak points of his position. He did not possess that strength of will which enables some men to put aside their worries once they have made their decision.

He enjoyed such credit at G.Q.G. that, contrary to their habit with other army commanders, they refrained from disputing his demands. In this way he deliberately refused to allow the official photographer access to his sector a few days before his entry into the battle of the Somme. The pictures he was to take were intended for our propaganda in America, and a guarantee was given to General Micheler that the plates should be put under seal until the attack had been made. He would not listen, and wrote three times to the Commander-in-Chief that he declined responsibility for operations if the photographer continued to work with his army. He was allowed his way.

In spite of the hopes of General Micheler, the Tenth Army produced little impression upon the situation. In fact, this army was not very favourably placed. In order to profit by the first surprise, it should have

attacked at the same time as the Sixth. It was said that it was not then ready, but by July 20th it was too late.

Such incidents show how the hope of ending the war inspired our soldiers. During the whole war they fancied at each offensive that the enemy would be driven out of France. Hence the high spirit with which they attacked. If courage alone had sufficed, the Germans would not so long have polluted our country. Unfortunately the problem which faced us was more complex than this. The Command had always fresh difficulties to contend with. Each day's fighting taught it something fresh and raised fresh questions. In justice to the General Staff, it must be said that it did not spare any pains. How many instructions compiled one day were modified the next! It was a constant search for the best methods in every direction. Precedent was far less prevalent than has been made out. The advice of the armies was always considered by Joffre's Staff. So it happened that a remarkable work on shock tactics, written by a young and unknown regimental officer, Captain Laffargue, became an official textbook for a long time. This officer was summoned to the Operations Department, and hundreds of thousands of his pamphlet were printed and issued as a standard work on the subject. Such acts redound to the credit of the Staff. In consequence, one may be somewhat sceptical as to the denunciations of unheeded generals and unknown inventors like the famous M. Archer, whose claims General Percin advocated so strongly. The trench guns, called later infantry guns, which he had invented, were obviously unsatisfactory. I have seen the officers, who were accused of refusing to consider this device, investigating it very closely, and only condemning it upon its becoming certain that nothing could be done with it.

The three years of trench warfare was a long period of study for the French Command. Could it have succeeded in evolving the method of attack which eventually led us to victory without these costly

experiments? It is hard to say. Perhaps the valiant troops at our command could have been more carefully economized and profitable lessons learnt at the same time. However, in the case of the battle of the Somme, it was because it was persisted in for nearly four months without any other apparent result than slight daily advances that the whole chain of German positions on a front of fifty kilometres was so shaken as to force the enemy to make their extensive withdrawal in the spring of 1917. It is true that in November, when winter put an end to the operations, no one suspected this determination on the part of Hindenburg. It is a fatal thing that commanders should be tempted to seek useless successes through hope of promotion. We have seen periods during which the blood of our soldiers was poured out to gain a general an additional star. During the Somme, after General Duval, Chief of Staff of the Sixth Army, was obliged to leave his post through ill-health, there was a series of disconnected attacks undertaken for no other purpose. But G.Q.G. very soon put an end to them.

This battle of the Somme, so brilliantly begun, and from which we derived unexpected advantages the following year, led to the unpopularity of the eminent commander who had waged it. When I arrived at G.Q.G. in November, 1915, Foch was looked up to by everybody. But a year later the Operations Department unanimously deplored the fact that the day of this great warrior was over. His original ways, his eccentricities which were once regarded as marks of genius, seemed now only to reveal the approach of senility. The rumour that his health was failing spread more than once. The motor accident which befell him added weight to these reports. The day on which the news of this was received, I met a senior officer, one of the most prominent of the "Young Turks," in the lift of the hotel. He told me abruptly, in a rough and harsh tone which betrayed his own personal animus, that General Foch was at the end of his tether, and that no further account need be taken

of him. I was all the more astonished that two officers whose judgment was to be relied upon, Lieutenant Pernot and Second-Lieutenant Madelin, having in turn had occasion to spend several days in Foch's company, had returned amazed at his quick understanding, clear mind, and activeness of body and brain. I told them what I had heard ; and it gave us much to think about.

It was evident that we were to see the preparations for a counter-offensive in favour of Joffre undertaken by his faithful subordinates. As a matter of fact, this was more than ever necessary. He was at the end of his credit. The death of Gallieni in May had apparently put an end to the struggle between the War Minister and the Command ; but it had in no way discouraged the enemies of G.Q.G.

This question of General Foch's disgrace was in my mind when quite recently I met one of the three or four officers who had lived in Joffre's confidence. When I asked him about it, he told me that early in December, 1916, while he was walking with the Commander-in-Chief in the forest of Chantilly, the latter asked him abruptly : " It seems that Foch is ill ? " The officer began to laugh, and with the frankness allowed to him and appreciated by his Chief, replied : " What, you too ask that question, General ? I thought it was only General Castelnau's entourage who believed in that illness." Joffre just smiled, and said no more. Some days later the note putting Foch at the disposition of the War Minister appeared, signed with the name of Pellé. General Foch came to Chantilly and made so violent a scene in his interview with Joffre that his voice was heard in the neighbouring rooms. It is said that Joffre replied : " You are stellenbosched, I shall be stellenbosched, we shall all be stellenbosched."

It is an interesting fact that this famous note, when the Commander-in-Chief was changed, was delivered to General Nivelle, who strongly declined to accept it. Joffre carried it off with his papers. In 1918, M. Clemenceau, then Minister of War, asked that it should be communicated to him, which was done willingly.

He returned it in three days, saying that he had no right to have it. It is probably still in the hands of Marshal Joffre. The note authorizing the removal of Sarrail, with Dubail's report which caused it, had the same fate; none of the generals who succeeded to the Supreme Command would accept it. *Timeo Danaos.*

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General Roques had succeeded General Gallieni. This appointment appeared as a victory for the Command. General Roques, a personal friend of General Joffre, seemed certain to support him on all occasions, and act as a rampart between him and his enemies in Paris. At least, so G.Q.G. thought, and there was great rejoicing at his presence at the War Office.

It was, however, easy to see by the sequel that General Roques changed his attitude towards his old chief. I have always had the impression that the War Minister was playing his own game. Far from decreasing, annoyances became more frequent. The pursuit of General Staff officers became keener. Parliamentary control was actively supported by the Minister. General Roques' journey to Salonika, instead of resulting, as G.Q.G. hoped, in the disgrace of Sarrail, gave Briand an opportunity for pronouncing a eulogy of that general in the House.

In short, when the check on the Somme and the disasters incurred by the Roumanians threw into the shade the real successes achieved on the French front during the year, dissatisfaction against Joffre came to a head. The capture of Fort Douaumont on October 15th only profited General Nivelle. All the glory of this magnificent exploit was credited to him, and suddenly claims were made in favour of his candidature. G.Q.G. saw the signs and became resigned. From then onwards one heard nothing but praise of Nivelle in the departments. Since Joffre was condemned, the victor of Douaumont was preferable to any other. The Deputy Chief of Nivelle's Staff, Colonel d'Alenson, had for some time been a member of the Third Bureau, where he had made many friends.

It was probably due to him that Nivelle, who possessed a very high degree of intrigue, and who knew very well the power of the departments, learnt that his nomination would be favourably received at G.Q.G. G.Q.G. visibly abandoned Joffre and Pellé, whom nothing could now save, and whose downfall threatened to involve their Staff. General Pellé particularly was attacked. The Operations Department accused him of compromising G.Q.G. by what they termed his political leanings. "Let us concern ourselves with the war and nothing else," said the prudent ones. He was blamed for having given too much rope to the Information Section and to the Section of Distant Operations, which by their constant intervention in non-military matters had incurred the wrath of the Foreign Office and the Government. It may not be out of place to sketch the history of the Information Section, for which such complaint was made against General Pellé, and of the Distant Theatres Section, which became the shirt of Nessus to the victor of the Marne.



CHAPTER VII

The Information Section

AT the end of December, 1915, the Information Section, till then established on the first floor among the Great Powers, had emigrated to the fourth floor of the Hôtel du Grand Condé to make room for General Castelnau. The section was beginning to be of real importance. It had been placed on a firm basis by M. André Tardieu, who, during 1914 and some months of 1915, assumed the task of editing the daily *communiqués* and the official accounts.

M. Tardieu's talent, his extraordinary capacity for work, and the friendship shown him by General Joffre, with whom he had his meals, had gained him the esteem of the General Staff, and especially the Operations Department, whose idol he became. Both a journalist and a parliamentarian, Tardieu's prestige had destroyed the prejudice which these two professions had aroused at G.Q.G.

His position was unique, and attained by none of his successors. He was, one might say, the General's civil adviser. I found among the documents of the Information Section a scheme for an armistice, written by him about May, 1915, which greatly resembles that subsequently drawn up by Marshal Foch. In it is to be found the clause providing for the occupation of the left bank of the Rhine and the bridge-heads on the right. Although slightly premature, it is evidence of the foresightedness of G.Q.G., but above all of the excessive confidence created by the attacks in Artois. In November, 1918, as soon as it was known that the Germans were seeking terms, I notified General Duchesne of the existence of this scheme and gave

him a copy of it. It is possible that this was forwarded to the Marshal and that he made use of it.

Rapid promotion had been the reward of his services. But feeling that he might be accused of governing under the cloak of Joffre, Tardieu transferred himself to Foch's Staff, to the great regret of the Commander-in-Chief. He then asked for the command of a company of *chasseurs à pied*. In this capacity he distinguished himself and secured mention. Then he was seized by a sort of stroke while in the front line, and for a time his life was in danger. The news reached G.Q.G. that very evening, where from the general concern I could judge of the goodwill every one felt towards him.

It is true that later, as a result of a disagreement with G.Q.G., he appeared to disapprove of their actions. Certain unfriendly conspiracies in the lobbies and a series of articles in the *Petit Parisien* criticizing the High Command were attributed to him. This caused a pained surprise at Chantilly, and he was for long spoken of as a model of ingratitude. Those who were inclined to sentimentality described the sorrow of General Joffre at his abandonment by one whom he loved as a son. And the result of all this was a definite opinion that "it was a great mistake to have placed any confidence in a journalist." It was perhaps for this reason that the first successors of Tardieu were a diplomatist, Captain Puaux, and a highly placed official of the Bank of France, Captain Haulpetit. But when these two officers were summoned to other duties, journalists were again called in.

General Pellé had sufficient sense to rise superior to such considerations. He had recognized the usefulness of the Press and the part which it would be called upon to play in a campaign which threatened to drag on. The High Command could not afford to dispense with so valuable an instrument. In consequence, General Pellé set to work to organize the Information Section in the form of a Press agency. A certain number of officers, journalists, and literary men were summoned. Distributed through the armies, the

duties of these information officers were to witness operations and to compose on the spot stories which should recount to the public as accurately as possible the heroic actions of our troops and the details of the fighting. A twofold moral advantage was anticipated: for our countrymen to live in sympathy with those at the Front, and for the troops to have the satisfaction of seeing recognition of their heroism.

In accordance with this scheme, Second-Lieutenant Louis Madelin and Captain Henry Bordeaux were attached, the former to the Verdun zone and the latter to the First Army. A former editor of the *Temps*, Second-Lieutenant René Puaux, was already working with Foch's Northern Army Group. The new service was put under the charge of an eminent writer on foreign affairs, M. Maurice Pernot, the correspondent of the *Journal des Débats* at Rome and Vienna; and talented publicists like François de Tessan, Georges Grappe, Fernand de Brinon, Henri Menabrea, Louis Gillet, and Charles Tardieu, who until then had served at the Front, were placed under him. The assistance of the brothers Tharaud was also sought; but it was impossible to make the Personnel Department see the necessity for literary collaboration. One or other of the two brothers could be attached, but as there was no regulation which could permit of both of them being appointed to the same post, the project fell through. After Verdun, the perusal of an excellent war-book written during the battle by Captain Delvert, who was one of its heroes, determined General Pellé to attach this officer to the Information Section.

It was not without some alarm that the staffs saw the arrival of these dangerous men, whose duty it was to see everything and to describe what they saw. In some cases it was necessary to secure the intervention of General Pellé before the necessary information was placed at the disposal of the information officers. It was an unheard-of thing that temporary officers, most of them mere lieutenants, should be allowed access to the most confidential offices, turn

over the leaves of secret orders, and cross-question generals.

Further, during the battle of Verdun, General Pellé decided that, in order to speed up the service, the information officers should telephone their articles direct to G.Q.G., without submitting them to the Chief of Staff of the Army to which they were attached. This proceeding caused so many heart-burnings that General Pellé's successors cancelled it and returned to the regulation channels of communication.

A further grievance was the presence of military photographers, who accompanied the information officers and were allowed the same liberty of action on the Front. It seemed outrageous that they should be allowed to photograph battery positions, observation posts, the front line, and even the departure of assaulting columns. They were always full of boldness, especially when they were under the orders of Second-Lieutenant Croze, a dramatic critic whose love of first nights was so great that he never missed an attack.

The prejudice died slowly. The Staff became used to the appearance in their sectors of the information officers and their photographers. Certain generals, delighted at reading in the great dailies of the exploits of the troops they led, came to request their presence. As for the regimental officers, they had immediately recognized the value of the new arrangement. But the suppression of names, which was the invariable order, deprived the stories of much of their interest. Several times the Information Section, supported by the Press, begged for permission to mention the numbers of the units engaged and the names of their commanders, as was done in the German Army. They came up against opposition on principle. General Joffre's entourage was determined that names should not be given, for these officers had no taste for popularity themselves. Theirs was the pride and delight of working unknown. They felt only the pleasure of real power under the shadow of the great chief, which is the privilege of trained and ambitious

men, whom the vain honour of being known can by no means satisfy. It was said that it was a matter of moral dignity ; there was the danger of giving the unwholesome taste for publicity to troops inspired with the pure spirit of sacrifice. Besides, were there not grave inconveniences in forming a halo of popularity round the leaders, especially as the astute ones would contrive to monopolize it to themselves ? The question was never definitely decided. Moments of comparative laxity succeeded periods of extreme severity. In the end, it was agreed that after a period of some weeks had elapsed it was permissible to mention names of officers up to battalion commanders and the units engaged.

Only once was a name mentioned in the *communiqué* under the *régime* of Joffre : that of Major Raynal at the time of the defence of Fort Vaux. Once Mangin's name was on the point of being inserted, at the time of the first and short-lived recapture of Douaumont on May 22nd, 1916, but at the last moment the Operations Department secured the deletion of his name.

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These innovations of General Pellé were not very acceptable to the Government. Parliamentary circles became uneasy at the idea that G.Q.G. should secure influence over a number of journalists. Papers are naturally favourable to those who supply them with news. To permit the Information Section to communicate directly with the Press was to give the Military Command a lever upon public opinion. The minds of the politicians were haunted throughout the campaign by the spectre of a military *coup d'état*. G.Q.G. were given a definite order that nothing was to be sent to the papers without previous permission from the War Office.

It is curious how often great events spring from small causes. The Bureau of Military Information in Paris, originally situated at the War Office, had been attached to the Press Bureau when the latter was set up in the Rue François 1^{er} in 1916. It was through this bureau that the Information Section dealt with

the papers. A rivalry ensued between the two services which soon degenerated into open hostility. The Information Section accused the Bureau of Military Information and the Press Bureau generally of opposing its propaganda, and endeavoured to do without them as often as possible. The B.M.I. for its part accused the rival G.Q.G. service of political motives in opening direct relations with the Press. Besides, the B.M.I., persuaded of the supremacy of the civil power, refused to believe that soldiers could be fit to direct public opinion. On the other hand, G.Q.G. despised the ignorance and levity of the Paris Bureau.

No one supposed that these minor disputes would lead to serious complications. The Press Bureau, closely in touch with the Government through M. Berthelot, who, having organized it, could not allow any criticism of its utility, contributed greatly to the Government's mistrust of G.Q.G.

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It was in the matter of foreign politics that the Information Section was accused of exceeding its powers. And it is true that, in the interests of the nation, the Major-General had on his own initiative undertaken a propaganda campaign among the Allies and the neutrals.

Lieutenant Pernot, an agent expressly chosen by General Pellé for this purpose, knew every shade of European politics. He had spent fifteen years of his life out of France, in the Diplomatic Service, and had known General Pellé in Berlin. Thanks to his wide connections, many publicists and politicians from the allied and neutral states visited G.Q.G. They found there a well-informed man who enabled them to put their fingers on the essential facts of the situation. General Pellé, with his great tact and persuasive eloquence, pleaded the cause of France before them, and showed that victory was certain if sufficient sacrifices were made. Lord Northcliffe, among others, came several times and acquired the conviction, in the course of his interviews, that conscription would have to be introduced into England. This determined

man, on his return to his own country, began a Press campaign in favour of this scheme, which succeeded in spite of opposition from many quarters. Lord Burnham, the proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph* and President of the powerful Newspaper Proprietors' Association, also came to the same source for inspiration. He made an arrangement with Lieutenant Pernot by which our matter was reproduced in all the Association's papers in England and the Dominions, which was an enormous gain for French influence. General Castelnau supported General Pellé with all his power in this direction. His frank, plain speaking pleased the visitors, and his sincerity appealed to them. More than once he moved them to tears by his accounts of the heroic sacrifices of the French soldiers. All those who heard him went away ardent supporters of the French cause. How many Americans, during that anxious period during which the German lies produced a feeling of doubt, were definitely converted to the French point of view by their visit to G.Q.G.! But the Quai d'Orsay and the Press Bureau looked askance at this enterprise.

Several times sharp clashes occurred. For instance, the Foreign Office and the Press Bureau wished to include among a party of neutral journalists who were to visit the Front a publicist whom Lieutenant Pernot had formerly met in Vienna in doubtful circles. He informed General Pellé of this, as in duty bound, and the latter refused the inclusion of the publicist. The Press Bureau, its *amour-propre* touched, displayed great annoyance and demanded insistently that the reason for this refusal should be imparted to them. They were referred to the Police, who possessed an unedifying record of the individual.

That should have been sufficient to open the eyes of the diplomatists. But not a bit of it. The Chief of the Operations Department, who did not fear to accept responsibility, was compelled to forbid access to the Front to a publicist accredited by the Press Bureau. On another occasion, contrary to the advice of G.Q.G., a party of neutral journalists was allowed

to visit the Front. Once back in their own countries, the gentlemen hastened to write the most venomous articles against us. It must be admitted that if G.Q.G. was a trifle punctilious, the Press Bureau displayed an *amour-propre* which was most unsuitable to the circumstances.

The question of the military attachés gave the finishing touch. It was an excellent idea, and one immediately put into practice, that the attachés should be employed to counter the false news from German sources. In order to do this, they must be kept in close touch with events at the Front. A service of daily messages was constituted for their use. This was so efficient that in every Embassy it was the military attaché who became the man best capable of informing the Press as to the course of the war. Naturally, foreign journalists acquired the habit of going to the attaché for news, a circumstance which increased his prestige and could only be useful to the French cause. The advantages which this system brought us during the battle of Verdun were incalculable. To the messages were added regular consignments of photographs, documents, and articles for the Press, written with the idea of strengthening the confidence of neutrals in our victory.

As soon as the Press Bureau was set up, the Foreign Office claimed the monopoly of this foreign propaganda and put it in the hands of their own people, maintaining that it was outside the functions of the military attachés. But the latter had proved too useful for us to cease to send them information. They had acquired considerable experience, and it was absurd, merely from considerations of bureaucratic sensitiveness, to dispense with their services. So in time propaganda agents were attached to the ambassadors; this was superfluous, and naturally caused confusion. It may be candidly admitted that the continuance of the military attachés for this purpose was due to the fact that the Press Bureau was not always happy at first in the selection of its propagandists. It sent poetesses, women of the world, the

denizens of clubs, all sorts of people who in common parlance were known as "the cream of Paris," but who, considered eccentric even in normal times, seemed very much more so in war-time, especially to foreigners. This snobbishness, applied to such important matters, exasperated the officers of the Information Section. This duplication of propaganda agents led to constant friction, which the B.M.I. and the Press Bureau laid at the door of General Pellé.

At the end of 1916, the Major-General, attacked on all sides, determined to jettison Lieutenant Pernot. There were other considerations which compelled him to get rid of this officer. As a matter of fact, G.Q.G. itself displayed hostility towards the work of the Information Section. Seeing the continual extension of this service, the departments could not understand how such an important organization, including some fifteen officers, could be controlled by a mere Lieutenant of the Reserve. This argument was so powerful that the Major-General, although superior to such considerations of precedence, thought it necessary to comply with them, and to entrust the control of the section to an Artillery Brigade Commander who had passed the Staff College, by name de Cointet.

This senior officer, who had efficiently controlled the Second Bureau of the Verdun army, failed to realize that the chief grievance against the Information Section was its very existence. He set himself to develop it still more fully along the lines it had already followed. He formed a plan for the intensive production of newspaper articles to supply all the Paris and provincial papers. For this purpose the establishment of officers was raised to thirty.

Major de Cointet also formed an idea of keeping in touch with certain writers who, acting as military correspondents for their papers, were too frequently lacking in information and military knowledge. These men complained that they did not obtain from the B.M.I. the support and advice to which they were entitled. So the Major went to Paris to establish contact, and his car was seen before the offices of the

great dailies whose proprietors he had determined to encourage. He fulfilled his duties in the manner of a soldier who goes straight ahead without heeding criticism, hid nothing, and filled the newspaper world with his zeal and good-nature.

So much activity, which could only tend to increase the influence of G.Q.G. with the Press, redoubled the anger of B.M.I. The Information Section must be suppressed. The replacement of General Joffre by General Nivelle furnished the desired pretext. In December, 1916, at the same time as the Commander-in-Chief and the Major-General left their posts, Major de Cointet left his.

Attached to Colonel Toutain's section, which dealt at G.Q.G. with the relations between the civil and military authorities, the Information Section began its death-agony. Colonel Toutain, who during civil life had become initiated into political ways, knew by experience that the way to maintain peaceful relations between the two Powers was to do away with the business that was a cause of discord. With praiseworthy conscientiousness he scattered the information officers to the four winds of the Front, forbade the few survivors to telephone to G.Q.G. or to write anything but official notes, and allotted to other sections the matters dealt with by the Information Section. The care of organizing tours in the "Zone of the Armies" was given to the Police, and at "the Front" to the Camp Inspectors. Photographers attached to armies were forbidden to go into the forward areas until further orders. Information in the true sense of the word was left in charge of the Paris Bureau. When G.Q.G. left Chantilly, the Information Section was already no more than a memory.

CHAPTER VIII

The Troubles of T.O.E.¹

EARLY in 1916, at the same time as the Information Section developed, the T.O.E. came into existence. Both services were the result of General Pellé's idea of organizing the war policy of G.Q.G. The need of a single command followed quite naturally from the doctrine of "a single front," and it was felt that M. Briand, who had enunciated, and perhaps invented, this doctrine, could not but support every measure that tended to its application. But, paradoxically enough, the organizations which were to put it into effect received a most unfavourable welcome in political circles. The question of the T.O.E. marked the critical point in the antagonism manifested towards G.Q.G. by the various Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Blockade, and Finance.

The T.O.E. was a sort of miniature G.Q.G. within the larger body, and consisted of a First, Second, and Third Bureau. The idea with which the T.O.E. had been formed was this: to have an organization which should co-ordinate the forces of the *Entente* in the struggle against Germany in every direction. In the Second Bureau, a special service under Major François Marsal, a retired officer who had been a bank manager for many years, dealt with financial and economic questions. Major François Marsal, among other problems, had studied the best way of aggravating the food troubles of Germany. As a case in

¹The T.O.E. (*Théâtre des Opérations Extérieures*) was the organization at G.Q.G. which dealt with all the theatres of war in which French troops were engaged with the exception of the Western Front. The Near East was, of course, its principal preoccupation.

point, he proposed that the Roumanian corn stocks should be purchased. He never ceased to demonstrate the inefficacy of the Blockade, the willingness of England to allow her subjects to trade with neutrals, who were obviously supplying Germany, as well as the evasions which occurred with us. Nothing was simpler to prove. In December, 1915, the figures supplied by the Military Information Bureau at Folkestone, which was in touch with our agents in Holland, Sweden, and Denmark, proved that these countries imported ten or even twenty times as much commodities and products as in 1914, the surplus obviously going to Germany. Major François Marsal also drew attention to the necessity of keeping in France the American securities deposited in our banks, these securities being the means by which Germany bought all she needed in the United States. Inspired by him, the Command expressed a wish to see the Government take energetic steps among the Allies, and particularly England, to suppress as far as possible this state of affairs. But it soon encountered opposition from the Ministries, which showed an ill-will that could only have originated in official jealousy. M. Ribot, among others, who had perhaps an even greater contempt for soldiers than he has for humanity at large, resented this intrusion into the financial sphere. He desired to put a brake on it by setting against the T.O.E. the Senatorial Military Commission, already hostile to General Joffre. This Commission did not belie his hopes, and vigorously attacked the T.O.E., for whose dissolution it pressed continually. It was thus the strongest weapon in the hands of these advocates of watertight compartments. At the very height of the battle of Verdun, M. Jeanneney made a report in which he called for the suppression of what he termed the useless service. Personally, I am of the opinion that this rivalry resulted in clogging our movements. Whatever may have been the manner of procedure at G.Q.G., it is impossible to say that it was in the wrong. It is difficult to form any idea of the ill-will of the civil departments, who regarded every opinion of a mili-

tary department as senseless, however correct it might be. "Let them get on with the war and not concern themselves with anything else," was the note which was sounded perpetually. Never did the *amour-propre* of the Civil Service give way to the necessities of the general situation.

Without being versed in every detail of these sordid quarrels, any impartial observer could tell from the echoes of the strife that G.Q.G. was encountering innumerable difficulties. It can be affirmed that, on the part of the Command, the sole desire which animated its officers was the welfare of France. Many of these officers had been in civilian life fully qualified experts in the realms of economics, finance, and propaganda; and it is easy to understand that, having left the cares of their profession behind them, shut up in this sort of military convent with the sole idea of being of use, they brought to the study of the problems of war an activity and conviction which was in marked contrast with the official dilatoriness, inherited carelessness, inertia, fear of responsibility, and above all the ignorance, of the Paris Government offices, too often occupied with petty questions. The officers at G.Q.G. could bear witness to the red-tape with which certain Ministries trammelled matters essential to the national defence. How much time was wasted and how many half-hearted measures were taken, when close co-operation and goodwill would have produced excellent results!

The most curious thing was that the exclusively military circles at G.Q.G. despised these efforts of their colleagues. To them all the details of the struggle against Germany in other than the military sphere seemed childish. "We must win by force of arms alone," they said. "Unless we succeed in inflicting a military defeat upon Germany, we shall have to begin all over again."

What was the object of this war in distant theatres? they asked. Was there any front but the Western front? Attack the enemies' main forces was the Napoleonic principle. So the Operations Department

of the North and North-Eastern Army Groups opposed, sometimes openly, all the demands of the T.O.E. They could not bring themselves to believe that the diversion of the smallest unit from the Western Armies would not endanger the outcome of the war. On the first floor of the Hôtel du Grand Condé they highly approved the demands of *L'Homme Enchaîné* for the withdrawal of the Salonika army. And yet it was by no means every day that they found themselves in agreement with *L'Homme Enchaîné*!

The T.O.E. fought on as best it could against this theory, which it knew to be correct. Napoleon was a great man, and it was difficult to oppose his principles. Of course, they would have liked Sarraill to have brought off some great success without demanding reinforcements. At the receipt of each demand for men and material (and Heaven knows they were frequent enough), there were explosions of wrath against this insatiable Satrap of Salonika.

Between the hostility of Paris and the indifference of Chantilly, the T.O.E. led a precarious existence. What did General Joffre think of the matter? That remains unsolved. Did he believe in the efficacy of combined action by the Allies in every sphere? It is hard to say. In any case, he upheld the wise diplomacy of General Pellé. And perhaps this was less because he understood the necessity of intimate union with the Allies than because he was not sorry to increase his authority.

The Commander-in-Chief was by nature undaunted by any responsibility, however considerable it might be. He felt himself to be equal to any situation and was quite content to bear the brunt of any decision concerning the war. Every day he devoted part of his time to examining the affairs of the coalition. He approved measures to be taken in economic and financial as well as in military spheres, and signed the letters by which the Command drew the attention of the Ministries to these problems. Backed by this omnipotent force, his colleagues redoubled their efforts and spared no pains.

It is certain that, despite the hindrances of all sorts with which General Pellé and his colleagues were surrounded, the general direction of the war at this time was practically in the hands of the French Command. Through his liaison officers he maintained direct relations with the friendly governments. Major Berthier de Souvigny, for example, who had succeeded in arousing real sympathy in England, proved how high the prestige of Joffre was with the English. No doubt this prestige was as high elsewhere. Thanks to him, it had been possible to secure the greatest measure of assistance and convergence of effort. Before this man of powerful appearance, who said simple and direct things with honest cheerfulness, the Commands of the *Entente* bowed respectfully. The decree of December 2nd, investing him with supreme authority over all the French forces, was shortly to lead to the establishment of a single inter-allied Command.

But the idea seized Joffre that the excess of authority which the decree of December 2nd had conferred upon him was really a subtle blow aimed at him. Was he not to be raised to such high estate in order that the real power should be taken from him? The appointment of Castelnau as Chief of the General Staff increased his mistrust. If too much scope were given to the T.O.E., if it were to become a great inter-allied organization to co-ordinate the efforts of the coalition, was there not a danger of its absorbing the whole of the Commander-in-Chief's activities, with the result that the command of the French front would be withdrawn in order to allow him to devote himself to the task of general supervision?

As a result of these fears, as well as of the opposition of the Ministries, the T.O.E., instead of growing, remained as an attached bureau with the ill-defined task of establishing liaison between the Allies for the distant theatres, and finally devoted itself almost entirely to the Salonika front. In this last respect it was torn between its desire to help operations in the East by according support to Sarrail and the scepticism of the Western Operations Department.

Obviously Joffre, under the influence of the Operations Department, was not inclined to extend the Eastern enterprise: for one thing, because he had only moderate belief in Sarrail; for another, because he did not believe in the efficacy of a campaign pressed home against the Bulgars. The only thing that mattered was the main front. On the other hand, the Salonika force was M. Briand's pet idea. So much so that the Command and the Government did not share the same outlook, and found themselves in constant opposition.

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Since I have come to speak of the Salonika expedition, it is a good opportunity for telling what I know of the origin of the matter. Whose was the idea of forming a front in the East? M. Briand has told us that it was his. But I have it from General Castelnau, who only attached a relative importance to it, that he had some reasons for claiming the origin of the idea. This is how it happened.

At the end of 1914, when Austria, beaten by the Russians and the Serbs, was losing ground everywhere, General Castelnau, who commanded the Second Army, had an idea of enlarging the scope of the war. It seemed to him that if an Anglo-French force came into action from the direction of Serbia, its intervention must tend to accelerate the defeat of Austria and to rally to our cause the Balkan peoples, who were hesitating as to which side they should favour. General Castelnau frequently expressed these ideas to his Staff in the course of animated discussions in which two officers, Major Gervais, a senator, and Captain Lasies, took a prominent part. M. Lasies had in his hands a note from General Castelnau, who, in the form of a letter to a friend, set out his theories succinctly. It seems natural enough that Messieurs Gervais and Lasies, hoping to see the triumph of ideas which they thought favourable to a quick termination of the war, submitted them to M. Briand, with whom they were in touch. And it is from these beginnings, perhaps, that the latter formulated

the suggestions which he made at this time to the Cabinet.

I do not know what M. Briand would say to this. Even if it were proved that the idea was suggested to him, he deserves no less credit for supporting it. To my mind, the most curious thing about it is that the idea of trying to strike at the enemy at his weakest point, that is to say, on the Eastern side, should have been claimed by only these two eminent men. The more I think of it, the more it seems to me that everybody at this time had the same idea. I am sure that a dozen articles could be found in the files of the newspapers to that effect. In the hospital in the south where I was then, there was a rumour that volunteers were to be sought for a Serbian expedition.

Besides, every time that Austria seemed to be on the eve of disaster, the same idea could be heard: for example, when the Italians achieved their first great successes. So true it is that in the course of this war the man in the street argued often more soundly than his leaders.

In the same way, when the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* took refuge in Turkey, people thought that, under cover of this circumstance, the Strait would be occupied to keep open the only means of communication which we had with Russia. In truth, if public opinion has often had good ideas, the rulers in every sphere have shown an inconceivable narrowness of imagination. Impartial history will judge severely the men in whose hands lay the destinies of the countries at war with Germany. Rivers of blood and terrible sacrifices were needed to repair their lack of foresight. That we should already have forgotten such incapacity is the fact that will most astonish our descendants, for whom victory will not constitute a total amnesty.

To return to the Salonika expedition, it is notorious that M. Briand had great difficulty in persuading our General Staff to establish a front in the East. In December, 1914, G.Q.G. opposed it, as it opposed the combined military and naval expedition against the Strait proposed by Mr. Winston Churchill, as he

himself revealed in 1920 in the House of Commons. G.Q.G. only consented to participate in the Dardanelles expedition, which followed the check received by our fleets in the Strait, because it was necessary to restore the prestige that our arms had lost. In the same way, it only consented to come to the rescue of the Serbs when impelled by necessity, and when it was already too late. Without doubt, the principles which guided it did not lead to the same conclusion as ordinary common sense.

Towards the end of 1916, although an allied army was on the Macedonian front, G.Q.G. haggled over the troops required by General Sarrail. To his constant demands they more often than not turned a deaf ear. While Sarrail complained of insufficient men and material, the T.O.E. loudly declared that he had everything necessary, from any point of view, for breaking through the Bulgarian Front. The inaction he maintained was put down to his incapacity and lack of enterprise. History has not yet given its casting vote.

I drew up the *communiqué* of the Army of the East, and I frequently witnessed the anger of Colonel Billotte, the head of the T.O.E., and his officers. I often thought that these men, most of whom belonged to the Colonial Army, tended perhaps to liken the Salonika expedition to a war against negroes or Chinamen, which only wanted luck.

Moreover, it is very probable that, being Staff officers before anything else, they did not realize to its full the importance of the Balkan Front. Nobody at G.Q.G., either in the Operations Department or in T.O.E., would have believed for a moment that the decision of the war could have been brought about by a victorious offensive of the Army of the East. I remember the profound astonishment, and for that matter the wounded *amour-propre*, which General Franchet d'Esperey's triumph produced at G.Q.G. General Pétain must perhaps be excepted, since he had for long been an advocate of the extended war. The immense successes achieved shortly afterwards

on the Western Front had thrown into the shade the dazzling victories of this despised Army of the East. It even seems that efforts were made to belittle the unprecedented results which it had obtained. In any case, it was evident that we neglected to exploit to its full the magnificent situation on this side of the chess-board. On a secondary front, victory must presumably be considered secondary. And so it was.

However, one thing is certain, that September 26th, the day of the Bulgarian capitulation, was the decisive date of the war. Later, when historians are able coolly to review the facts, without fearing to arouse patriotic feelings that prevent impartiality, they will ask whether the war was not won on September 26th. Perhaps they will give it as their opinion that the fruits of victory were ripe and that we could afford to wait until they fell without exertion. The defection of Austria and Turkey was imminent. What could have prevented the Allies from securing a free passage through the Habsburg Empire, already crumbling, and carrying a terrible threat into the heart of Germany?

But the doctrine of the "principal front" had still its ancient power. It was on this front that the final victory was achieved, for it was necessary that this should be so. The French General Staff, despite the Hindenburg line, was justified up to the very end and its glory will be great. Besides, a whole nation ardently wished, for the same reason, to see the enemy beaten on that part of the national soil upon which he had so odiously trampled. The symbolism inseparable from patriotic sentiment delighted in this exemplary chastisement, in this turn of fortune's wheel. Who knows but what, in the Empyrean, the shade of Napoleon, observing the data of the problem and remembering the glory of Ulm, dreamt of a gigantic enveloping movement which should impose on the enemy, at little cost, a final capitulation? Perhaps at this moment he asked once more why soldiers had drawn from his vast and fertile teaching only the fury of attack and not the imagination which conceives great strategy.

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As far as the T.O.E. was concerned, what is difficult to understand is why, knowing what they did of Sarraill, whom they accused daily of lack of initiative, and given their lack of belief in the front in the East, they should have adopted so active an attitude as regards Roumania. For there is no doubt that to the officers of this department, and principally to their chief, belongs most of the credit for having brought Roumania into the war. The unwearied energy of Colonel Billotte weighed very greatly in the balance. While the Roumanians still hesitated, he exercised great pressure upon their military attaché, Colonel Rudeanu, who came almost every other day to G.Q.G. Neither flattery, nor thrusts at his *amour-propre*, nor even violent tirades were spared him. With that military impetuosity and conviction which were characteristic of him, Colonel Billotte, a man of Mangin's type, for whom the word impossible did not exist, literally put the hesitating Roumanian against the wall. I can see him now, spick-and-span in his magnificent uniform, glittering with gold lace and stars, pale beneath his plumed cap and evidently the prey of terrible perplexity. He was well aware of the dangers which menaced his country in case of a check. Could the Army of the East hold the Bulgars? Would Sarraill attack them with sufficient vigour to allow the Roumanian army liberty of movement? They answered him, "Yes, a thousand times yes! Sarraill has important forces, and his instructions." On the other hand, to the precise conditions laid down by Colonel Rudeanu, the General Staff, after a period of protest, finally gave its assent. These conditions were as follows: "The Roumanians shall be the sole directors of their plan of campaign; they mean to attack in Transylvania and not on the Bulgarian Front." They were given in to on every point, so great was the desire to decide the matter, and these concessions always closed with the word "Attack!"

But I heard sensible men, particularly Lieutenant Pernot, who was very well informed, express the opinion that it was rash to draw Roumania into the struggle.

He drew attention to their lack of heavy artillery and their small reserves of munitions. Alike determined in his views and candid in his speech, Lieutenant Pernot did not hide his opinions from the T.O.E. A quarrel ensued between him and these officers, who had hitherto been on excellent terms. The enthusiasm of the T.O.E. was not daunted by these obstacles; they declared that the Roumanians had received a quantity of heavy guns, that they were short of nothing. And as for Sarraïl, he would attack. This confidence was curious, after so many proofs of mistrust.

General Joffre was the least convinced of the utility of Roumanian intervention. He hesitated for all the reasons which the T.O.E. would not see. Further, he had a strong impression that the Russians would not lend the new belligerents all the help that was expected of them. The Russian army was exhausted by its last offensive which had cost it considerable losses. This information he had from General Alexeïeff himself, and the reports of his attaché in Russia did not give him great hopes. Was this the right moment to induce the Roumanians to relinquish their neutrality?

On the other hand, a strong party at G.Q.G. favoured intervention. I remember the expression used to Lieutenant Pernot, who obstinately expressed his doubts. "Five hundred thousand extra bayonets cast into the battle have never prejudiced those at whose disposal they were." As always happened, there was an irrational confidence in the valour of the Allied contingents. Finally, the great argument which always cropped up in such circumstances, the argument of the Second Bureau, was employed. "The state of the German effectives is not very good." There was no doubt, they said, that with the extension of the front which the Roumanian intervention would produce, "the enemy will not have a single division in reserve." The most absurd hopes were built on this. Others counted upon a crushing moral defeat. General Castelnau, who always made fun of the optimists, said, "The Roumanian army will be the marching wing of the Russian masses." And he was right,

provided that the Russians and ourselves were willing to keep their promises.

But the French Government was certainly the most anxious of all to see the participation of the Roumanians. M. Briand counted upon a great political success in consequence. Probably reassured by the T.O.E., he could see in Joffre's resistance only an instance of the instinctive dislike in the West to all operations in other theatres. Besides, he believed, like every one else, that the more allies there were against Germany, the greater were the chances of victory. The idea of the war of attrition persisted for long.

They did not take into account the policy of the German General Staff, which was always to attack the weakest. That policy was contrary to the principles which guided us, enunciated later by General Nivelle in those expressive words which revealed the constant aim of the French Command, "Destroy the main body of the hostile armies." This is certainly more difficult and far more expensive. To offer to Germany a weak point in the combined front was to tempt her to concentrate upon it. All the more so since by this means she would come into possession of great resources, which were beginning to fail her.

At this time the Government must have exercised great pressure on General Joffre. A letter from M. Berthelot exists, addressed to the French Ambassador at Petrograd, in which, in the name of the Government, he told him not to be swayed by the negotiations of the military mission, which was lacking in enthusiasm, and to maintain constant pressure on the Russian Government and on General Alexeieff, to approach M. Sturmer to gain over the Czar so that the intervention of Roumania should be decided upon at once.

The day that Roumania declared war was one of triumph. In the midst of the general joy, all fears for the future were forgotten. Without loss of time congratulations and rewards were heaped upon the T.O.E. ; and it was well, for the reckoning was not far off. Sarraill's army attacked feebly, to the fury

of the T.O.E., who talked of having Sarraill shot. Then the disasters began. What followed is well known. Germany, far better off than when she was at peace with Roumania, could revictual herself in a country teeming with wealth.

It would have seemed natural that those who had engineered the intervention should have been horror-struck; and not only they, but also the Operations Department which was responsible for the conduct of the war. But not a bit of it. They had made an attempt which might have succeeded; it had failed, and so much the worse. Men of action are very philosophic. One thing was evident, that only the French army remained to settle with the Boche, and at this reflection every one was happy.

Nevertheless, this disaster to our Allies caused us the loss of the fruit of our victories of 1916. Germany recovered cheaply from her crushing defeat at Verdun and the six months of retreat on the Somme. The general situation, so brilliant a month before, became confused; the end of the war seemed further off. Further, the prognostications of the Second Bureau as to the wastage of German divisions, proved to be hopelessly fantastic. After the initial successes of the Roumanians against the Austrians, when the theory of a concentration of German troops to relieve Austria and drive back the Roumanians had been propounded, the Second Bureau had replied: "With what can they attack? They have no more than half a division in reserve." As a matter of fact, this half-division turned out to be half a dozen. I heard a puzzled officer of the Second Bureau with his head between his hands say: "But where the devil do they get them from?"

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On the other hand, the officers of the Information Section, who messed with those of the T.O.E., displayed much concern over the disastrous end of the enterprise. We could not understand why our colleagues who, three weeks before, had built such great hopes upon Roumania's entry into the war, seemed now wholly

detached from the matter. Their psychology was inexplicable to us; by what logical reasoning could they manage to be thus satisfied in spite of all?

We got an explanation in the simplest possible way. Colonel Pénelon, the liaison officer of the Presidency, often came to our mess. His cheerfulness and wit and the attractiveness of his conversation made us keen to have him. Colonel Pénelon possessed the remarkable faculty, no doubt natural with him, but which his duties must have developed, of repeating with the utmost exactitude the conversations which he heard. His memory was extraordinary; he repeated word for word the suggestions made in his presence; he even reproduced the intonation and expression of the speakers. We often verified the accuracy of his accounts, and he acknowledged our tributes smilingly. A man of keen wit, he delighted in exercising his gift. But these half-unconscious imitations had the further advantage, which he overlooked, that they informed us of the mentality and opinions of the important men at G.Q.G. Colonel Pénelon visited every day the principal heads of departments, and especially those of the Operations Department, to keep himself informed of events. Extremely devoted to Joffre and his entourage, he adopted without dispute the views of the General Staff. Did he always believe in them? I do not know. At heart, he was detached from the opinions he professed, and changed them with ease. A long study of Anatole France, from whose works he recited whole passages by heart, inclined him towards a gentle scepticism. But, his duty being to convey to the civil powers the opinions of the Command, he discovered them to the best of his ability, made them his own without question, and put a liveliness, a warmth, and an enthusiasm into their recital.

At lunch, before the officers of the Information Section whose appreciation pleased him, he would before his departure for Paris rehearse the arguments which he was to sustain at the Elysée in the afternoon, before the associates of the Ministers of War and Foreign Affairs and before the Ministers themselves. Since

it was known that the Ministers' offices are the very sanctuaries of ill will—according to military circles—it was his business to put in a good word, to restore courage, and inspire confidence.

At the time of the German offensive in Roumania, one day when consternation could be read in our faces, we saw Colonel Pénelon displaying profound satisfaction.

"Why, what's your trouble?" he said to us.

"Why, everything that's happening, Colonel: the Roumanian defeats——"

"Nonsense, what harm can that do? Do you imagine that will alter the aspect of affairs? Not the least in the world! All these victories of the Boche are no more than flea-bites, I tell you."

Amazed at this assurance we exclaimed indignantly, "Flea-bites! What about the capture of Bukarest?"

"A flea-bite!"

"And the gain of supplies? The harvests of Wallachia? The petroleum?"

"All flea-bites! All this time Boches are being killed. The Western Front stands firm and intact, so Germany had gained nothing. For that's where the war must be decided. For the grandeur of France and the honour of the Army it is essential that we must gain the victory there. But that's just what they don't understand in Paris. The victories of the Boche in Roumania disquiet them. I am going to try to explain things to them. But sure enough they'll disbelieve me and rail against soldiers."

And the excellent Colonel Pénelon, resigned to the prospect of bearing the brunt of the fears and misunderstandings of the civil powers, climbed into his car, repeating, in a noticeably less convinced tone: "Flea-bites, flea-bites!"

Since my account leads me to speak of Colonel Pénelon, it will be as well if I say something of the difficult duties which he performed with the help of his assistant, Major Herbillon.

One or other of them occupied an office at G.Q.G. only nominally, the greater part of their time being

spent in a car on the road between Paris and Chantilly in execution of their liaison duties. They must surely have been among the greatest users of petrol in the Army; and I should not be surprised if Major Herbillon, who remained till the very last, were the world's champion for mileage. This perpetual travelling, begun in the first month of the war, never ceased, even when the Government moved to Bordeaux. I leave to the imagination what the journey was like then, along roads covered with people fleeing before invasion.

These officers had acquired the care-free outlook of the old postilions, sleeping on the road, leading a double existence, having two homes, two sets of belongings, and acquaintances all along the route. Thanks to their generosity, it had become the custom to use their car as supplementary to the train service, and it must be confessed that we imposed upon it. A certain general did not hesitate to send regularly to his wife by this convenient means certain parcels which had nothing military about them.

It astonished those who knew the independent spirit of the General Staff that such a regular contact could exist between the civil authorities and the Command. As a matter of fact, had it rested with the Command, I fancy the whole campaign would have passed without any consultation between the two powers. It was the civil element that took the first step in circumstances which I shall describe later.

In truth this liaison was not altogether friendly, from what one could learn from the Colonel's hints. In the morning, when he went to see the Departments, he looked anxious. On the good or bad progress of affairs, his day depended. If all was going well, he met with nothing but smiles, a spirit of confidence was in the air and his task was easy. But if he was the bearer of bad news, he was certain of a chilly reception. His faithfulness to his chiefs was put to a severe test, for from two directions he was to some extent considered responsible for events. He reminded us of those unhappy messengers of Asiatic courts, who were put to death when they brought ill tidings.

He told us how one day, on entering the Minister's room at tea-time, he innocently approached M. Albert Thomas. He, with a cup in his hand and biscuit crumbs in his beard, his eye flashing behind his glasses, walked up to the Colonel, and with an air of profound indignation, went "Pff, Pff!" The Colonel, overwhelmed, tried to make some remark. But Albert Thomas, walking up to him again, repeated the performance. As the wretched Colonel remarked, "What was I to do next?"

At Chantilly it was the same. He witnessed explosions of wrath against the civil power whenever he came with a message of censure. "You can tell them, Pénelon, that they make me sick, you understand me, tell them that." Very often high personages, knowing that he would employ parliamentary language to convey the desires of either party, gave vent to their spleen in his presence in no stinted terms. The Colonel, thanks to the great resources of his vocabulary, employed in such cases turns of phrase of the most exquisite moderation; euphemisms and paraphrases fell from him in great profusion, so well that any kind of discontent became an expression of perfect pleasure. General Joffre, little used to eloquence, did not always perceive the poisoned thorn hidden under the flowers. So much so that one day, when one of his orderly officers explained to him the exact and somewhat unpleasant meaning of his message, he exclaimed with amazed indignation: "But you betray me, Pénelon!"

However, this man, subtle, courteous, cultivated and full of common sense, performed the most valuable service. His devotion was his last defence. It was known that he was incapable of embittering a suggestion, of misrepresenting a thought, of weaving into the web of his liaison a single thread of personal interest. Further he was known to add to these qualities, which usually accompany a melancholy nature, a measure of humour, and equable temper, and a delightful friendliness, which had gained him at the Foreign Office the nickname "April Sunshine."

The author proceeds to examine the organization of the T.O.E. in considerable detail, in the course of which he gives the following sketch.

"The method of work of the T.O.E. was the despair of the Cipher Section. Its officers displayed tremendous activity about ten o'clock at night. Until two in the morning, sometimes later, they drew up long reports, sent cipher messages to every corner of the globe. Certainly the problems they had to solve in these laborious night-watches were arduous enough. How many rifles for the Russian Army could a hundred reindeer sledges carry? Was it possible to cross Albania from west to east in a motor-lorry? Sometimes they would hunt everywhere for some one who knew Albania or the Murmansk coast."

The T.O.E. was destined to finish the cycle of its existence in a sort of apotheosis. At the moment when, by a turn of luck, it was to become the nucleus of the military organization, it fell to pieces suddenly and was reduced to nothing. Its scattered members were distributed among the various administrations and it ceased to have a separate existence.

This part of its history is involved with the disgrace of General Joffre. It is well known that in December, 1916, in order to give satisfaction to those who clamoured for some reform in the Command, the President of the Council adopted this solution. General Nivelle became Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the North and North-East; and General Joffre, with the title of Commander-in-Chief of the French Forces, fulfilled the duties of technical adviser to the Government in matters relating to the general conduct of the war. In other words, Joffre was to become the "General of Generals," supreme throughout the world. In truth his functions were to be limited to devising with the Government the strategy that Nivelle and Sarraill were to carry out.

At G.Q.G. the solution had appeared satisfactory, if not to Joffre himself, at all events to the Departments. On the one hand, the Third Bureau knew that under Nivelle nothing would be changed; on the other, Joffre's entourage were to accompany him and form his new Staff as super-generalissimo. They set to work to constitute this Staff at once. There was great

competition among the officers. The T.O.E. was to become, by virtue of the part it had played up till now, the kernel of the new Staff. A magnificent establishment was spoken of, worthy of the future Commander-in-Chief of the whole Coalition, for that was the goal aimed at. They sought at the gates of Paris for a site at once quiet, picturesque and easily accessible. This, of course, increased the desire of every one to form part of the new establishment. At first Bellevue was thought of, as having plenty of modern hotels which could be requisitioned. Finally a big building at Neuilly was decided upon. With the luxurious tastes common to Staffs, the establishment was to be organized on a lavish scale. One after another the most popular officers were selected. General Gamelin, just promoted, had arrived at G.Q.G. in great haste to organize the super-General Staff, of which he was to become the working Chief. General Pellé, as far as I remember, was to continue as Joffre's second-in-command. Two ideas were current; according to one, as many branches as possible should be represented in the new G.Q.G., in order to render it more imposing; according to the other, it was better to keep the number of its officers as low as possible, in order to make appointment to it a high honour and also to avoid attracting the notice of the civil power.

A lieutenant, chosen from the ranks of the Information Section and promoted to the dignity of quartermaster, left at once with an administration officer of high rank to arrange the place of which photographs had already been inspected. They spent much money in soap and wax, and had huge quantities of coal and wood delivered to the cellars. The senior officers' chargers, with a squad of grooms, left for Neuilly by short stages. On the day before the date fixed for the departure, which was to be made in motor-cars, the orderlies carried the officers' baggage and kit into the hall of the Grand Condé, and the boxes containing the archives of the T.O.E. were stacked on the fourth-floor landing. That evening healths were drunk in the mess

to the fortunate ones who had been chosen. The usual jokes as to the good times they would have at Neuilly were bandied about, they were wished a comfortable journey. Since the departure was fixed for an early hour next morning, we should not see them again.

On the following day, at about eight o'clock, the officers of the Information Section arrived at their offices, ready to take possession of the rooms vacated by the T.O.E. To their amazement, they saw that the baggage had not been moved. It appeared upon inquiry that the departure had been postponed on high authority. General Joffre, summoned to Paris, had left in haste. For three days things remained thus. The Neuilly party now and then opened their kits carefully to find a handkerchief or a clean collar. The chargers having arrived at their destination, ate their first feed in the loose-boxes of the deserted mansion, while their grooms wandered about the empty rooms like lost souls, wondering what had happened.

Then suddenly the decision was made known. General Joffre, promoted Marshal, was to retire. The T.O.E. would be transferred to the War Office. The new super-staff was disbanded, and the officers who were to have formed it were to resume their former duties. This was done. The purveyors of the district were told to take back their wax, soap, coal, and wood. It cost the Princeps no more than a hundred and forty francs and a few centimes.

The new Marshal summoned his heads of departments to the Villa Poiret to bid them farewell. It was a sad leave-taking. All were painfully moved at the idea of leaving the illustrious man who had led them so long, and were fearful of the future which seemed so threatening. The Marshal, whose rank entitled him to three orderly officers, asked who among those present would accompany him in his retirement. Major Thouzelier alone raised his hand. The Marshal expressed his surprise at this, whereupon General Gamelin said gently to him, "General, you must not blame those who have their career to make." And, in

truth, Joffre bore no ill-will. When every one had left, the Marshal glanced once more over the villa which had housed so much glory. Then he smiled, and giving a friendly pat to the faithful Thouzelier, he made his favourite exclamation as he passed his hand over his head. "Poor old Joffre! You damned old Thouzelier!"

The author closes Part I with an account of the various prominent French civilians who visited or were employed at G.Q.G. This chapter opens with a very striking account of the relations between the military and the civil power.

"After the victory of the Marne, there was in reality only one power in France, that of Joffre and his Staff. The Government, deprived of all prestige by its flight to Bordeaux, made itself small in the shadow of the Commander-in-Chief. It had felt the wind of catastrophe in the days when the Germans were marching on Paris. The idea of retribution filled with terror most of the Ministers, whose consciences were troubled by the memories of their obstruction of the three years' law (by which it was proposed to raise the term of military service to three years). They prudently sheltered themselves behind the responsibility of the soldiers, which they allowed to develop to the maximum, thinking that it might take the place of their own if things turned out badly.

"And it must be admitted that the soldiers, far from shirking it, ostentatiously assumed it in its entirety. If many details and several essentials had not been foreseen before the war, on the other hand the disguise of the absolute autonomy of the Army had been carefully provided for. An officer with an armlet immediately took the place of the local functionary. It was only by an incredible oversight, whose evil effects were often deplored by the Command, that the Ministers and the President of the Republic were not mobilized. The latter particularly, once the Decree of August 2 was signed and the patriotic speeches delivered, found himself without employment. No legal tie existed between him and the war organization. Had he been of military age, he would no doubt have rejoined his depot.

It was a ridiculous situation, which was hardly perceived immediately. From the depths of his palace, M. Poincaré, too proud to make the first move, did not know how to get into touch with the Commander-in-Chief. He was practically ignorant of what was going on. Reading the papers, talking to visitors, even the indiscretions of the Secretary of State for War, himself ill-informed, were not sufficient to afford him a true idea of the situation.

"One may well ask what would have happened if at this time the Army had been commanded by a General less orthodox than Joffre. There is no doubt that the Government regarded with considerable misgivings the immense popularity of such men as

Pau or Castelnau, the victor of the Marne. Might its stay at Bordeaux not well have caused its overthrow? In any case, even if in the fear of popular outcry it had been spared, with what suspicion would it not have been regarded? I believe it to be a great blessing for France that it escaped from this situation. Would the Staff have successfully withstood temptation? Would not ambitious men, the engineers of *coups d'état* which an Army always carries in its train, have used the victorious General for their own ends?"

PART II

THE TRAGIC
INTERLUDE
OF NIVELLE



GENERAL NIVELLE

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CHAPTER I

General Nivelles's First Days

ONE morning, about eleven o'clock, as I arrived in General Pellé's waiting-room, I found there an unknown Divisional General who was waiting with some impatience to be received.

Tall, young, and well turned out, with fine, proud, and regular features, this General impressed me very favourably. Urged by curiosity, and also by natural sympathy, I asked him whether, in the absence of the orderly officer, he would like me to take him in to the Major-General.

Gravely, but in a good-natured tone, he accepted my offer and told me his name—General Nivelles. He was the new master, the chief of all the French Armies, who had come to assume his command like an ordinary individual reporting for the job to which he had been appointed. When General Pellé was made aware of his presence he ran out to him, apologizing for having unconsciously made him wait, and took him into his room.

Thereupon I began to reflect on the luck of this man who, a colonel of artillery at the outbreak of the war, found himself suddenly raised two and a half years later to the highest office. Was this the man destined by Fate to be the saviour of his country, I wondered? Should I see in him one of those triumphant careers which dazzle the imagination? Was this the miraculous soldier whom so many Frenchmen awaited, and who would restore order to democracy after having conquered the enemy? Since Napoleon the whole of France has lived in the expectation of a military miracle, and nothing encourages this idea more than a siege war, long and bloody, whose end no one can foresee.

I was meditating thus when the two generals came

out of the room. General Pellé's orderly officer had not yet come back, and I was asked to inform General Castelnau of the Commander-in-Chief's arrival. General Nivelle followed me. Having announced him I stood back to let him enter. General Castlenau had risen from his chair, and stood waiting behind his desk. General Nivelle, on the threshold of the room, said, "Good-morning, General." "Good morning, Nivelle," replied Castlenau. Then he stepped towards him and added, "Good morning, General."

What shades of meaning there were in this little scene! The new Commander-in-Chief approaching his recent superior, whose chief he now was, acted as though he wished to show the respect he had for him. He seemed to say, "I do not forget in my new dignity who you are and the respect I owe you." And Castle-nau, on his part, with the pride of an old soldier conscious of his worth, acknowledged his homage by a momentary familiarity which his age and services permitted, but immediately accepted the rule of the man put over him by Fate. I was as pleased as though some personal happiness had befallen me. Nothing is more agreeable than to perceive good sense in men to whom such a great task is entrusted. To know that the French Army was in the hands of this young and courteous commander, who had at the first opportunity shown his skill, tact and perfect mastery over himself was a matter for congratulation to anyone who felt for the welfare of his country. I described the scene to the officers I met. They were as much impressed as I was, and accepted it as a happy omen. Although in the eyes of many, General Nivelle's qualities were not to be compared with those of Foch, Pétain or Castlenau, yet from the moment of his arrival he enjoyed boundless confidence. We bowed before his fortune, saw in it the sign of a destiny more powerful than the slow progress of promotion, and we trusted in his good luck.

On the evening of his arrival I submitted the *communiqué* to him. His first day of command coincided with the receipt of bad news. The Army of Verdun, which he had just left, had sustained a slight check.

The enemy had taken 1,200 metres of trenches and a certain number of prisoners.

The General was working in an office next to Colonel Claudel's, which was lighted only by a lamp placed on the table, the rest of the room being in darkness. I studied him while he carefully examined my draft. His face had assumed a grave look which struck me. It was like one of those fine portraits by Carrière, in which may be seen the mind of the sitter. He seemed the very incarnation of thought; this was not the face of the trifler, nor yet of a gambler. The burden of responsibility and the grandeur of his task were already marked by the furrows of his brow and the gravity of his eyes. With a stroke of a pen he struck out the paragraph dealing with our repulse. "Let us wait till to-morrow," he said; "perhaps the position will have been regained."

I was rather surprised that so small an event should have seemed to him of real importance. Next morning, as the situation had remained the same, I re-inserted the item; the German *communiqué* would appear in the afternoon, and would not fail to exaggerate the details, as usual. It was better for us to be beforehand with them in order to show the matter in its true proportions. But still he wished to wait, and now I perceived in his voice a shade of irritation and a certain nervousness in his manner. I realized that his mind was no longer free. This man felt the gaze of France upon him and doubted his own judgment. I remembered the unshakable confidence of "Father Joffre," whom nothing could upset, so sure he was of his popularity. "This is the penalty of being a new man," I thought. "Will he retain public confidence long enough for him to prove his worth, and for his part will he wait as long as he should for an opportunity of justifying himself and of delivering an assured blow? Anxious to justify his sudden elevation, will he not be tempted to stake his fortune on a desperate move?"

Some days later I met Lieutenant Madelin, who was passing through G.Q.G. Madelin, until now attached to the Second Army, had seen a lot of General Nivelle dur-

ing the Battle of Verdun. He was at his Headquarters at the time of the recapture of Douaumont and Vaux, at the same time as Captain Henry Bordeaux. Both had perceived his worth, and praised him very highly.

When I saw Madelin, he had just met General Nivelle in the hall, and he was a trifle disappointed. "How difficult it is to bear good fortune," he said to me. "Here is Nivelle, no longer the same man. Four days ago he was so modest and quiet, and now he is utterly changed. Not that he was not thoroughly kindly to me, but all the same I noticed in his attitude a sort of self-satisfied *hauteur*, a tinge of vanity which surprised me. At the same time I thought him rather tired and dejected. Can this man, whom I considered a model of wisdom in every sense of the word, have changed already?"

Such were the indications which guided us in our knowledge of the man to whom the Government had just given the mandate of victory.

General Nivelle had brought from the Second Army three officers who formed his entourage: his two orderly officers, and a third, Colonel d'Alenson. Although the latter's name never became known to the public, it is important that he should not be neglected. He played a considerable part, and his influence on the progress of events was great. . . . One of the most brilliant officers who had passed through the Staff College, Colonel d'Alenson had the face of an ambitious man. Dark and tall, of a height unusual even in a cuirassier, he was at the same time exceedingly thin. His long face, bony and furrowed, his great angular features did not at first promise ability, rather strong will and obstinacy. Silent, hardly speaking at all, or in a scarcely intelligible voice, he seemed to drop his voice from the heights of his spare frame. Always badly dressed, with untidy hair and beard, he walked about the corridors with his hand in the belt of his breeches, seeing no one, lost in thought with the air of a melancholy Quixote, the victim of dyspepsia. In spite of his awkward appearance he was not lacking in kindliness. His distant air concealed a great shrewdness and an extremely sound judgment.

Whenever he was pleased to discuss my profession with me, I found him well informed, familiar with general subjects, and entertaining enough with his drawling speech which gave his witticisms an unpremeditated air. But to tell the truth this is more correctly the portrait of the man I met in the Third Bureau in the early months of 1916, for Major d'Alenson had previously belonged to G.Q.G.

When General Nivelle took command of the Second Army in succession to General Pétain, transferred to the command of the Central Army Group, Major d'Alenson, now promoted Colonel, left G.Q.G., and was attached to him as Deputy Chief of Staff. At this time I heard him spoken of by the officers of that Army in what I considered strong terms. I had known him as a man with a reputation for intelligence, and now they criticized his narrowness of mind ; I had thought him a good fellow, and now they complained of his gloominess and satirical speech. "A doctrinaire, dull and self-sufficient," was the expression used to describe him. I did not understand this difference of impression, but later I ceased to be surprised. He was one of those men of settled convictions and vigorous personality who can only create partisans or enemies, since they decline to make the slightest compromise upon matters of which they are convinced.

When he returned to G.Q.G. with his new chief, honoured with his confidence, and lit up, so to speak, by the rays of the rising sun, he seemed to me darker, more gloomy, and more furrowed. He had certainly lost his cheerfulness. Already set apart from his fellows by his great stature, he seemed anxious of his own will to increase his isolation. On the first day of his arrival I met him in the passage and greeted him, asking him if he wished to see the *communiqué* before it was submitted to the Commander-in-Chief. He answered me offhandedly : "The *communiqué* will not concern us much. We are here to work without worrying what people think of us." In this he showed himself a false prophet, for no one was to take a greater interest in the *communiqué*, or attach more importance

to the way in which facts were presented to the public, than General Nivelle and his *chef de cabinet*.

His old comrades of the Third Bureau noticed his changed nature for themselves. I know that they showed displeasure in spite of their discretion in these matters. It was easy to see that they had paved Nivelle's path to power, and so made sure that all Joffre's personnel would be retained—Colonel d'Alenson being their intermediary. They hoped that their old comrade, having secured this desirable end, would abdicate the authority he had acquired in favour of Colonel Renouard, the popular head of the Third Bureau. But apparently he did nothing of the kind. The post of *chef de cabinet*, which he got for himself, was irregular, and interfered with these plans. Always intervening between the Commander-in-Chief and the head of the Third Bureau, who, with the Deputy-Director of Operations, is the true arbiter of the conduct of the war, the *chef de cabinet* wields a power all the stronger because it is not defined and carries no responsibility. A constant and intimate colleague of the Commander-in-Chief, he is in a better position than anyone to secure the acceptance of his ideas to the exclusion of those of others. He identifies himself with the Commander-in-Chief, and then by the use of the formula "The C.-in-C. wishes so and so," he is in fact giving orders to everybody.

I repeat that nobody confided in me on this subject, but as the time passed and the plans for the great April offensive became definite, it was plain that Colonel d'Alenson's credit and authority were growing, that he entrusted to no one the care of preparing this great event, and that he found opposition round him of which, in his determined resolve, he took no heed. This silent and frigid giant, formerly indifferent to everything outside his duties, stood revealed as an autocrat of the most pronounced type, convinced of the important part he played, and confident to the extent of rashness in his own star. His health undermined, exhausted by unrelenting toil on the eve of the decisive struggle which was about to open, in spite

of a thousand daily difficulties, and the obvious lukewarmness of the Third Bureau, he seemed like an inspired man, utterly rapt in his visions, certain of their realization, and awaiting his triumph. I, who, at this period, saw him every day, can affirm that he was full of confidence and energy; that he reached those heights of enthusiasm trodden by great leaders who feel themselves uplifted by their genius. General Nivelle was carried away by him. From this hearth came the fire which consumed him. Between this devouring flame and Mangin, that forge showering sparks, how could he have helped believing that he was about to be the saviour of France?

But let us not anticipate. In December, 1916, there was no question of these vast schemes. General Nivelle had only just arrived. He was slightly dazzled by his future, and seemed nervous. Colonel d'Alenson, following his example, although apparently calm, felt within him the leaven of ambition; and this did not escape the eyes of those around him.

Another person in the General's entourage also showed by his attitude the idea that we were about to live under an adventurous régime. Captain Guillaume, a former orderly officer of General Lyautey, had acquired in Morocco, at the gorgeous court of the Resident-General, a curious manner at once high-handed and courteous which augmented his imposing deportment, his precise and refined manner, and his air of an audacious Court page.

Such were the two men who now entered into the life of the Commander-in-Chief, two men whose arrival had coincided with his good fortune, and who saw in him the future victor.

But at the General's side stood a man who formed a perfect contrast: Captain Déré, his oldest orderly officer, a shy man utterly devoted to his chief. His face wore the same expression of gentle gravity as that of the General, the same character, but refined and modified. He was no more than a devoted follower dreading to see the destruction of his chief's grandeur, and trembling for his master's fortunes.

CHAPTER II

Leaving Chantilly

A STRIKING incident proved the nervousness of General Nivelle and his anxiety not to draw upon himself the hostility of Parliament.

He was hardly appointed before he discovered that all the current stories regarding the life of officers at Chantilly were without foundation. His young son, who had come from Paris to spend a few days at G.Q.G., had said with a disappointed air, "I expected to have a thoroughly good time, to take part in sport and paper-chases, after what I had been told, but Headquarters is a regular monastery and very boring." In these circumstances, the Commander-in-Chief had asked the War Minister, General Lyautey, if there was any need to change the site of G.Q.G. No military necessity demanded such a change, which would entail great expense, and interfere with work for a week at least. The Minister had resolved to leave things as they were, and the question of removal had been dropped, when Senator Gervais came to visit the new chief.

His first words were, "Well, General, you are going to leave Chantilly?"

General Nivelle answered him in the negative, and explained that there was at present no military reason which would justify such a step.

"Perhaps not," replied M. Gervais, "but there is a reason of moral dignity, for all that."

General Nivelle quailed before this insult. Then and there he resolved on a move. And so Parliament had its own way.

The removal of a Headquarters is a very curious

spectacle. It happened that I took part in several of these strategic operations, and every time I appreciated the regularity with which humorous interludes took place. At such times one could perceive the ever-increasing proportions of the central organization of the forces. At Chantilly, on the eve of departure, it consisted of no fewer than 450 officers, and 800 secretaries and other ranks. Two complete trains and several hundred lorries were barely sufficient for the transport of the personnel, office baggage, and files. The motor transport sections of several armies were employed for this exodus, those belonging to the reserve being insufficient. During this time the armies evidently suffered from this requisition, which would have involved serious consequences in the event of activity on the Front. Care was taken to employ the lorries belonging to armies on quiet sectors, which involved their coming from considerable distances, in some cases from Nancy. The expense involved in these journeys may be imagined.

In the confusion of the undertaking, angry comments were made, many of them with considerable reason. "What an unnecessary business to drag about the Honours branch, with its stacks of boxes, its fifty male and female clerks, its pigeon-holes and typewriters? Would it not be better to send it to Paris?" On this line of argument it was seen that at least a third of G.Q.G. could without inconvenience be sent to Paris, as the War Office and the Commissions desired. The necessity for the reduction of G.Q.G. was apparent to everybody. But once installed, the Command would consider it no longer. It feared to diminish its importance by parting with the least of its branches, which, according to it, were as necessary to its existence as the rest, and whose separation would have prevented it winning the war. From Chantilly to Beauvais, from Beauvais to Provins, from Provins to Metz, and from Metz back to Chantilly, G.Q.G., growing ever more unwieldy, moved about *en bloc*, without abandoning a single unit.

I said that the removal was a strategic operation,

and nothing could be more correct. The most rigid secrecy was observed in carrying it out. The head of the *Commandement*, the Commander-in-Chief, the Major-General and his deputies, with perhaps the most important members of the Third Bureau (since it was an operation concerning the war), were alone initiated. But certain clues were not wanting to reveal to the inquisitive that a "packing up" was impending. The head of the *Commandement* and his assistant went away on a journey to an unknown destination. After an absence of forty-eight hours they were seen to return, endeavouring, not very successfully, to conceal their business, for removals were the important events of this service, the great affairs on which the promotion of all depended. Meanwhile boxes and kit-bags appeared in their quarters. The police employed at the station were the next to disappear. Then it was learnt that the servants of the Third Bureau officers had informed the local laundresses that they must return their masters' washing before the end of the week. It was the custom that, whatever the circumstances, the departure was always a hurried one. At Chantilly a strong hint removed all doubts. One fine morning, the two military telegraph wagons, which had been stationed since 1914 in the Rue du Connétable, opposite the post office, set off slowly on the road to Creil. We were moving, sure enough, but where to?

Every one began to conjecture, as always happened. From the nature of current operations and the position of the armies we deduced the logical situation of G.Q.G.; proximity to Paris was also a factor to be taken into consideration, owing to the constant liaison with the Government. The advocates of strategy, despising the civil power, imagined our installation towards the centre of the French Front, near Vitry-le-François or Epernay. Those who prided themselves on their diplomatic sense spoke of the necessity of being in touch with the English, and insisted that the right situation of G.Q.G. was at the junction of the Franco-British forces.

In spite of these conjectures nothing transpired as to the future home of G.Q.G.: the initiated kept their secret close. But, regularly, on the day before the move seemed possible, officers going into any shops in the town learnt from some sorrowing tradesman that G.Q.G. was going to such-and-such a place. It was truly comic to see the famous secret, unknown to the great majority of the G.Q.G. officers, made the subject of the conversation of the whole town. If one went to Paris one was certain to be escorted by a dozen people all equally informed as to the departure and the destination. These indiscretions infuriated the higher powers. Until the end they refused to admit that anyone had guessed rightly.

At last operation orders, with the word *Secret* on the margin, were issued to the departments. The move was to take place in two parts. The flower of the Staff was to move first, that is to say, the Personal Staff, the Third and Second Bureaux, and the units attached to them. The rest were to follow six days later. Everything was arranged so that the work should suffer as little as possible. The telephone system was not removed from the old Headquarters until the new one was entirely installed. I do not know how many miles of wire were thus used or how many thousands of lamps! In curtains for obscuring the windows alone seven thousand francs were expended. The saw-mills and carpenters' shops of the Engineer services made folding tables, shelves, and rows of pigeon-holes, painted a terrible yellow, by the gross in view of the coming move. For the offices of the Commander-in-Chief and the various Generals elegant furniture was provided. There was even a roll of carpet for the staircase to the first floor and the principal rooms, and a set of gilded door fittings for the Commander-in-Chief's office, which followed us at every removal. The members of the Third Bureau on this occasion were each provided with a little locked dispatchbox, made by the Engineers, holding note-paper, envelopes, and office requisites, which caused a lot of jealousy. The

famous safe which contained the plans of operations travelled in each move in the Commander-in-Chief's train. While on the subject of the Engineers' workshops, it is certain that they were much abused. At least I remember the indignation displayed at Provins by General Klein, who was in charge of it. "Do you know what the workshops at — are busy with?" he asked one day. "I'll tell you! In turning out bedside tables for the officers at Headquarters!" Obviously, General Klein, whose grumblings were well known, was exaggerating slightly.

The senior officers went by car: the vulgar mortals took their places in the train. The very day after our arrival all the messes were arranged, but it took several days for us all to settle down in our new quarters. Meanwhile, a storm of requisitions poured in upon the Quarter-master's billeting branch. If an unfortunate mistake had been made to the detriment of a member of the Third Bureau, it was a catastrophe. The Quarter-master's branch took care to establish at once the General, the Heads of Departments, and the Third Bureau. It then awaited fearfully the arrival of the rest.

The removal from Chantilly to Beauvais nearly had a tragic ending. During the two years that it had remained stationary, G.Q.G. had acquired sedentary habits. In two years it had tripled its importance. Besides its files it was decided to remove carpets, tables, and a large quantity of office material, for the building where we were to be accommodated was unfurnished. Colonel Loreau, the head of the Quarter-master's department, a shy man, who trembled at the sight of a General's star, had not the qualities of a great organizer. This was very soon evident from the fearful disorder which ensued. The most amusing stories were told about him.

It was said that when he went to Beauvais to look for a suitable place in which to house G.Q.G., he sought out the General commanding the place. Being unwilling to divulge his purpose, from the extreme importance he attached to secrecy, he talked vaguely

of a new organization comprising a group of officers for whom he was seeking offices and billets. The General had no idea that it was a question of Headquarters. He could not imagine that anyone should have the absurd idea of locating it in case of a move from Chantilly at Beauvais, twenty-five miles away, in the same Department, and still farther in rear of the Front. He therefore allotted a certain number of buildings, capable of holding fifty to a hundred officers, which to his mind was a fairly important formation. Colonel Loreau thanked him, inspected the buildings, found them insufficient for his purpose, and returned very late to Chantilly, to announce that it was no good thinking of moving to Beauvais, as there was no room. This seemed so astonishing that the Major-General was very annoyed.

At midnight, the General commanding at Beauvais was aroused by a telephone call.

"Hallo! hallo! This is the Major-General of the Eastern and North-Eastern Armies. General, you say that there is no room in Beauvais for the G.Q.G.? It is incredible!"

"I said no such thing, sir. Nobody has ever spoken to me on the subject."

"What? Didn't Colonel Loreau come and see you?"

"Yes, but that officer didn't tell me it was for G.Q.G. If he had, I would at once have shown him the High School, or the Agricultural Institute, etc., etc. . . ."

The amazement of the Major-General can be imagined. After a sound wiggling the unhappy Colonel went back, much abashed, hesitated between the new and magnificent High School situated on a wide esplanade and the old and dirty Agricultural Institute, lost in a maze of old streets. He visited one, then the other, unable to make up his mind, and then, goodness knows why, chose the Institute.

This rambling and venerable old barrack exhibited every symptom of discomfort. An army of orderlies and workmen in vain endeavoured for a week to clean

it and make the necessary repairs, especially to the central heating; but nothing was finished. When General Nivelle, escorted by his orderly officers, arrived, he found himself in an unheated building—it was in January of the bitterest winter of the war—of the most sordid appearance. Further, he had lost an hour in seeking his way through the labyrinthine by-ways of Beauvais, not a single gendarme having been posted to guide him. At last a hopeless block of lorries had stopped his car altogether, and he was forced to finish his journey on foot. His annoyance can be imagined.

It was greatly increased by his interview next day with the Prefect, M. Raux, who was then merely Prefect of the Oise, but was already equipped with the rudeness of manner and offhandedness common to Prefects. Being famous for his temper and vulgarity, he was anxious not to belie his reputation. On the day before, to the telephone call of the orderly officer who courteously informed him that the General Commanding-in-Chief had arrived, he had replied roughly:

“Arrived, has he? So much the better, so much the better,” and had unceremoniously hung up the receiver, grumbling: “What does he suppose I care for that?” As soon as he saw General Nivelle next day, the Prefect said angrily, “Where the devil are you putting up?”

“But you know very well that we are at the Agricultural Institute!” replied the General, somewhat taken aback.

“Among the parsons? Ah, I didn’t know that you were among the parsons. Besides, I don’t know where it is. I never put my foot into that hole, or in that filthy neighbourhood.”

If the conversation was not word for word as I have given it, it was absolutely so in effect, as were the expressions used. General Nivelle, extremely irritated and annoyed, discovered upon his return that all the walls of the Institute bore the device *Cruce et aratre*, and that the statue of the good *abbé* who had founded it

stood in the centre of the court-yard as if blessing G.Q.G. He flew into a violent rage, of which the echoes could be heard on the third floor. Before him, trembling in every limb, stood Colonel Loreau, learning the enormity of his crime, how he was the cause of General Nivelles, who owed his appointment to the fact that he was a Protestant, being accused of an intrigue with the priests. It was immediately resolved that preference should be given to the cause of non-clerical education, and that a move should be made to the High School. By the intervention of Providence, an hour's reflection calmed the General, who wisely decided to stay where he was, whether the Prefect should take offence or not.

If our departure had caused regret in the hearts of the hospitable people of Chantilly, our arrival on the other hand aroused the wrath of the inhabitants of Beauvais. At Chantilly the tradesmen groaned at seeing themselves deprived of the custom due to our presence, and grumbled at the new General. "Ah, Joffre would not have taken such a foolish and unjustifiable step. If they were going farther east, their desire to get closer to the Front would be understandable, but Beauvais! He must be off his head!"

At Beauvais the tradesmen groaned also, but for other reasons. In preparation for the establishment of G.Q.G., which could not allow of the presence in its vicinity of any other military establishment, the school for motor transport officers, a course for reserve officers, the troops forming the garrison, and a collection of Headquarters and Staffs of various Base services had been sent elsewhere. All these details represented a respectable assemblage of cheery spirits with well-filled purses provided with wives legitimate or otherwise, who, while awaiting the end of their courses or their departure for the Front, contrived to amuse themselves and spend money to the great advantage of the local tradesmen. The population had also been alarmed by a vindictive hunting of pretty ladies, undertaken by the chief of G.Q.G. Police, Commissioner Sorel, who obeyed his superiors' orders

unrelentingly. All the doubtful petticoats at Beauvais, or at least those who were strangers to the town, and goodness knows there were plenty of them at the time, had been pitilessly driven away. Whence came a new source of loss of profit to the tradesmen. This precaution, this excess of prudery, added to our occupation of a religious house, helped to give us a reputation for austerity which did not increase our prestige.

Naturally the police regulations imposed by the Provost Marshal were not of a kind to assuage the anger of the inhabitants. Cafés and cinemas were compelled to shut at half-past eight in the evening. The lights were extinguished for fear of aeroplanes, and patrols were instituted day and night, for the purpose of seeking spies, who worried belated citizens and abused shop-keepers who were late in closing their establishments. In short, endless annoyance was caused, under futile protests, and to no useful purpose, to a community of 50,000 people, who henceforth were not exactly conspicuous for their love of the Army. We met only with surly faces during our stay. Once only was G.Q.G. warmly cheered, and that was on the day of its departure.

The Prefect had an opportunity of avenging his town, and did not fail to take advantage of it. During the month of January it began to freeze with Arctic intensity. In February the thermometer fell to 20° below zero. A party of officers, having noticed a big pond in the garden of the Prefecture, determined to skate on it. Three of them, having one morning asked permission of the park-keeper, were amusing themselves by cutting arabesques on the ice, when an abrupt voice hailed them. At the edge of the pond a gentleman was regarding them malevolently. It was the Prefect. The officers, apologizing for the liberty they had taken, renewed their request for permission to skate.

"No, gentlemen, no!" replied the Prefect. "This is my domain, and I propose to keep it for my own. If your General had a pond in his garden, would you go to him and ask permission to skate on it? You

wouldn't, would you? Very well, I don't see why you should come and ask me for permission. I have the honour to bid you good morning, gentlemen." And he turned his back.

Still, we managed to exist at the Agricultural Institute. The Lines of Communication services of G.Q.G., occupying separate accommodation, as was their custom, showed superior wisdom by occupying a wing of the High School. While we shivered before smoky oil stoves, our colleagues of the Lines of Communication enjoyed a warmth and hot water to perfection. This made it easy for us to understand the wrath of the Prefect at seeing his empty and comfortable High School scorned in favour of an uncomfortable and clerical barracks. But, after all, with the exception of the cold, the place had its advantages. The departments, gathered together in close proximity, were very near one another, and this facilitated easy inter-communication.

CHAPTER III

The Beauvais Days

AS a matter of fact, nobody was pleased at leaving Chantilly, which every one looked upon as absurd. The increased distance from Paris made itself felt to those on liaison duty between G.Q.G. and the Government, and also, it must be confessed, to those who enjoyed a little relaxation in spare hours. Delays were so great on the line from Paris to Beauvais that the whole day had to be allowed for the return journey. As for the road, it was in such a state that a car took three hours to cover the fifty-one miles. This encouraged the optimists to think that they would at least cease to receive visits from Members of Parliament. Even General Nivelle had nursed this hope; but it was short-lived. The very day after our arrival Senator Gervais appeared to enjoy his triumph.

Some days later he received a visit from the President of the Republic and M. Briand, the President of the Council. The two of them, accompanied by Generals Nivelle and Pont, inspected the various *bureaux*, where the officers, drawn up in line, were introduced to them. M. Raymond Poincaré displayed a charming affability, shook hands with every one, had a kind word for many and a joke for some. He was obviously conversant with each one's duties and the attitude which each Department had adopted under various circumstances. It was quite perceptible from his manner that he was under no delusions as to the degree of sympathy which the civil powers could expect from the military. At the Information Section, the three officers who had survived the catas-

trophe waited their turn dejectedly, listening to the aphorisms of their chief, Colonel Toutain, who evoked the ancient majesty of our great kings as contrasted with the simple preparations now made for the visit of the Head of the State. Learned in the history of France, he was fertile in traditional anecdotes and made no effort to hide his scorn of common people and of democracy. There were noises in the passage, the door opened and the official party entered. Colonel Toutain advanced with his peculiar mincing manner which gave a curious rolling gait to his massive body. M. Poincaré could not repress a smile at the sight of him. "I welcome the strongest centre of resistance in G.Q.G. to the wishes of Parliament," he said jokingly, holding out his hand. Taken aback by this ironical allusion to his reactionary feelings, Colonel Toutain grew very red and could only stammer, while M. Briand, greatly amused, laughed heartily. The President of the Council, with his cigarette between his fingers, for he could not bring himself to go through his interminable visit without smoking, with his cynical expression and long hair, looked like a romantic poet wandering in the country. He could not help gazing with visible sympathy at the corpulence of this officer who to his mind called up the jolly form of Falstaff, as I heard him whisper as he left the room. From that time I understood the indulgence which all the parliamentary people had for Colonel Toutain, in spite of his scorn of them. Democracy is the triumph of fat men. To the democrat all fat men are worthy. Renaudel himself, on one occasion when we were talking of Colonel Toutain, confessed that he felt a sincere liking for him, because of his size, his excellent appetite and his knowledge of good wine.

General Pont, momentarily taken aback by the President's remark, quickly recovered his self-possession and wishing to display a conciliatory spirit, said, indicating the three officers who were endeavouring to conceal their mirth, "This is the Information Section, M. le Président, which now writes articles no longer and limits itself to forwarding to the Press Bureau

the information obtained from the Armies." This rather outspoken allusion to the accusation framed against General Pellé elicited no reply from the President, who did not return to the subject, and left after a few friendly words.

In this great Institute the visit of the two chief men of the Government had a curious resemblance to an inspection of a boarding-school. The endless comments which continued all day in offices and messes were very similar to those of schoolboys. On this occasion they brought up all the old stories of the past ten years of the coldness of M. Poincaré, the laziness and love-affairs of M. Briand. It is amazing how prone French people are to believe stories, more or less apocryphal, about prominent personalities, and with what delight they listen to them. It was like being in some little tradesman's *café* in the provinces, where the popularity of the *Cri de Paris*, which has for the whole of France the authority of an oracle, is evident.

The Prince of Wales also visited the establishment. The sight of this loosely made and shy lad, with the round and healthy face of a cheerful English boy, and the air of not knowing what to do with his legs and arms, delighted everybody.

We were close to the British sector, and the relations between our Allies and the Commander-in-Chief were very close. It was announced that they were to take over part of the line from us. General Wilson and his mission took up their quarters in a villa at the gates of Beauvais. As early as February the rumours of a coming offensive began. The highest hopes were built on it. Colonel d'Alenson's intimates spoke highly of his ability and decisive mind, and said that he would impart a wonderful force to the operation. The large number of troops which the Commander-in-Chief was to employ in the attempt to break through the German line were spoken of. Already the locality of the coming operations was marked on the map. The British launched daily extensive assaults, faultlessly carried out and successful in securing for them

numerous prisoners. We were full of confidence in them. But as the days went by the offensive still delayed. General Micheler came often to G.Q.G., and we expected every time that he went back to his Headquarters that the attack would be made. But G.Q.G. had not finished the preparatory work. We had rarely been so impatient. To tell the truth, we began to grow stale, and thought the event so long announced was unduly delayed. Towards the end of February the English attacks on the Ancre brought about a tremendous excitement. The Germans retired before our Allies, at first slowly and reluctantly, and then of their own will.

It was no longer a battle, it was becoming a retreat.

Then, like a train of powder, the news spread. "The Germans are going back. They are leaving their depots and stores, taking up the permanent way, destroying the stations, and evacuating the inhabitants." The information bulletins of the G.A.N. were feverishly consulted; every day they contained something fresh. Without a doubt, the enemy unwilling to withstand the shock of the coming offensive, had preferred to retreat. How far would they go? To the Meuse? Throughout the G.Q.G. the satisfaction was profound. But almost immediately experienced officers realized that this withdrawal had nullified the preparations for the offensive. For that matter this view worried nobody; the joy of seeing the Boche retire drowned everything. "We can still attack them at once and surprise them in full retreat" was the comment, "and so inflict a disaster upon them. That is evidently what the General will do immediately." I heard such remarks during the early days of March. In the Second Bureau, the First, even in the Registry and the Cypher Section one saw only people bent over maps declaring what should be done.

But the Third Bureau remained silent and sphinx-like. If the retreat was mentioned to them, they replied only with ironical smiles. In reality, the Third Bureau and Colonel d'Alenson did not believe in the German retreat. An army which had given

so many proofs of tenacity was not going to give so much ground without fighting for it. Was not the territory occupied by them the basis on which they reckoned to bargain for peace? Besides, they were soldiers before everything, and a soldier never abandons hope of victory. Now this retreat, if it should be genuine, would be an avowal that they had lost all hopes of beating us. Never would a true soldier, so long as he possessed men and material, consent to recognize such a thing. Such were the arguments of the Third Bureau. They forget that a retreat under certain circumstances may be a strategic move. Since we had struggled desperately for tiny patches of ground, torn strip by strip from the enemy, it had seemed that the whole of military science consisted in disputing ground foot by foot. Although I had heard it mentioned at the time of the battle of Verdun that ground had no importance, now it was declared to be everything.

It was a curious thing that, in spite of its authority, the Third Bureau convinced nobody. About March 10th a wave of indignation swept through G.Q.G. For the first time I heard Staff officers themselves criticize adversely the blind obstinacy of the Operations Department. Our inaction was held to be monstrous. Was the Operations Department responsible for this, or was the Commander-in-Chief and his *chef de cabinet*? It is impossible to say exactly. Future events showed us, at all events, that the Commander-in-Chief had refused to believe, in spite of everything, in the German withdrawal. It was known that he had replied to Franchet d'Esperey, who had informed him of the enemy's movement, that it was impossible to rely on so improbable a hypothesis.

In short, on March 15th, when the result of the serious enterprise which had been decided upon in the direction of Crapeaumesnil was known, it was impossible any longer to doubt the German retreat. The account from the Army stated that the enemy's trenches were everywhere empty. A few machine-gun posts had opened fire on our troops, but this had been a feint.

Besides, these posts had retired hastily. The order to follow up was therefore issued to all the units of the G.A.N. Consternation reigned among the General's entourage, and only gloomy faces were to be seen. The offensive prepared with so much care had become void. However, they pulled themselves together sufficiently to profit by the situation, which, from the moral point of view, was excellent. I was told to convey the impression in the *communiqué* that the enemy had retired under constant pressure from us, and that we were energetically pursuing him, engaging his rearguard and harassing his troops. They endeavoured to persuade me of the truth of this, in order to make my task easier, and I did not fail to believe them willingly. Colonel Renouard alone, as he read my *communiqué*, could not hide the sarcasm of his looks.

The anxiety to appear not to have been surprised dogged the mind of the Command, and I imagine that nobody was capable of declaring to the Commander-in-Chief that until the eve of March 15th he was deceived as to the German intention. G.Q.G. lived in an atmosphere of error which was to vitiate all future plans.

And very soon the destruction carried out by the enemy in the evacuated region made every one indignant. We realized what capital could be made out of this vandalism, as foolish as it was revolting. Certain officers were detailed to draw up reports on the devastation committed in the unhappy region. Photographers were sent to take pictures of ruins heaped up with barbarous refinement, and particularly of felled fruit trees. The whole French Press denounced these odious proceedings, and in the general anger the mistake of the Command was forgotten.

At all events, the country breathed a sigh of relief; the steel girdle which suffocated it had been released. The invader drew back, and the threat so long hanging over Paris was removed, since the enemy himself had decided to relinquish this coveted prey. All regarded this retirement as the beginning of the end. General Nivelle benefited from this idea; it was clear that the retreat was the logical outcome of the Somme,

and he reaped the fruits of it while Joffre and Foch, to whom all the credit should have been given, were in disgrace.

If he was greatly annoyed at seeing the offensive forestalled, his annoyance did not last long. The victorious march of our troops through liberated towns, the enthusiastic puffs in the newspapers, quickly brought the smile back to his lips. We lived in happy days, reading the reports of the armies which described their daily advance. It seemed that this must continue for ever. On the evening of March 18th I went to his house, a nice place with a court-yard and tastefully furnished, to submit to him the *communiqué* announcing the entry of our troops into Noyon. The General was alone in his room. Lying open in front of him was *Tout-Paris*, which surprised me considerably. Some days later some paper or other announced that General Nivelle had asked for M. Clemenceau on the telephone and had said to him, "M. le Président, the Germans are no longer at Noyon," an allusion to the catchword "the Germans are at Noyon" with which M. Clemenceau made great play for two years to the detriment of the soldiers. I have never known whether this really happened, but the presence of *Tout-Paris* on the General's table that evening makes the story possible. It is merely conjecture, as they used to say in the Second Bureau, and has only that value.

To emphasize more strongly the advance of our troops, it was resolved to push G.Q.G. as far forward as possible. A fresh move was announced. In spite of the customary secrecy on these occasions, everybody guessed that we were going to Compiègne. This was to place G.Q.G. very far forward, and the more cautious thought it too much so. But advance was in the wind and many prophesied that we should not grow moss in any spot. G.Q.G. would shortly move to Laon, as soon as the offensive should be launched. For now the talk was once more about the formidable offensive to be undertaken against the Boche whose retreat was by no means finished. It was even feared lest again we should be surprised by a fresh withdrawal.

The Germans could scarcely stop before they reached the Meuse; their present position was nothing but an intermediate line. One thing alone worried the optimists, and that was that the enemy had shown himself determined to retain the high ground of St. Gobain.

To start G.Q.G. on the victorious march which was to be its future lot, the move was made this time in a single effort, instead of proceeding in two stages as was the custom.

In this move Colonel Loreau brilliantly repaired the mistake he had made at Beauvais. All went off splendidly. On April 3rd the gigantic establishment was transported bag and baggage to Compiègne. A single journey sufficed. I went in a car with Major Ferrart of the Third Bureau, whose satirical conversation and ingenious outlook had always delighted me. All the way he showed me haycocks and declared that if forage was running short in France it was because Colonel Toutain had insisted that haymaking should be carried out by the Prefects. The latter, on the other hand, maintained that in the zone of operations the Army alone, having abundance of free labour, should carry out agricultural operations. The dispute dragged on and the haycocks rotted where they stood.

CHAPTER IV

The End of a Dream

IN the delightful town of Compiègne old houses and new villas are harmoniously grouped round the Palace. Delivered at last by the enemy's retirement from the nightmare of the long-range gun which used to bombard it ceaselessly, it received us kindly. It was a spot worthy of a General Headquarters; little bustle, wide avenues, a silence suitable for meditation.

Being almost entirely deserted by its inhabitants, it offered excellent facilities for the accommodation of our officers. We were distributed among villas beautifully and tastefully arranged. The messes of the big departments established themselves comfortably in the great basement kitchens of the fine houses in the Avenue Thiers.

I speak feelingly of these kitchens, for I often had occasion to enter them. It was the picturesque and pleasant side of my duties. It often happened that in order not to lose time I took the *communiqué* to the Director of Operations and the Commander-in-Chief at the dinner-hour. In winter the door and windows of the villa were hermetically sealed and shrouded with thick curtains, for fear of bombardments. I was therefore compelled to make use of the only free passage, the kitchen basement. There, in an atmosphere of cooking which sharpened my appetite, I waited until a waiter brought me back the *communiqué* which he had taken to the chiefs at their dinner-table, and I talked meanwhile to the kitchen staff, a quick-witted people for the most part. I do not mean that I gained all my information from them

(that would give some people too much pleasure); but I gathered from the way in which they spoke of the war some different outlooks which differed greatly from those of the General Staff.

One day, when I was emerging from these depths, I met in the Place du Palais a senior officer of the Lines of Communication, who greeted me with the deference due to a man who spoke every day with the Supreme Chiefs.

"Always among the great!" he exclaimed. "How is the General?"

"Wonderfully well," I replied, stifling a strong inclination to laugh. "He has eaten an excellent dinner."

As a matter of fact, from the appearance of the menu, I knew pretty well that it could hardly be otherwise that evening.

Our installation in the Palace of Compiègne, with its memories of Napoleon, seemed to every one a good omen. The polite curator, M. Gabriel Mourey, put the most beautiful rooms of the Palace at the disposal of G.Q.G. The Commander-in-Chief, with his entourage, and the Third Bureau were installed in the apartments of the Emperor and the Empress, in the wing of the château overlooking the park. There was immediately such an increase of the branches that the quarter-master was short of room. Gabriel Mourey willingly agreed to furnish the Commander-in-Chief's office, on the walls of which he hung beautiful tapestries, and that of the Major-General, but he found that his good nature was abused. Nothing seemed good enough for the Heads of Departments. They wrangled over an arm-chair. A little statue of *Moses* which had stood on the mantelpiece of one of the rooms was appropriated by one of these officers without the curator being informed. The marble bust of the Empress Eugenie was of course very much coveted. Colonel Toutain even asked for the Empress's bed, the one in his billet having given way beneath him. I do not think that he got it.

The important officers not only expected to be well

and magnificently housed, but demanded that their clerks should be beside them. And as this part of the Palace contained only reception rooms, clerks were to be seen with their typewriters beneath gilded ceilings, with a fine view over the park, while officers of the less-favoured services were relegated to the servants' rooms at the bottom of dingy courtyards.

The Information Section, as may be supposed, was among the worst lodged. Without air or fire-place, we were suffocated during this icy April by our oil-stoves; not that we cared, for the spectacle of the splendour of the Palace, in which we did not participate, sufficed to delight us. But we were made to see pretty well that we were not real warriors.

The Palace was packed to the roof. The third floor was a rabbit warren of little rooms opening into one another, most picturesque in appearance. The sections quartered in them, such as Aviation, Postal Censorship, Intelligence, seemed isolated from the world. Here one could, when bored, walk about without the necessity of going out of doors. An ordinary visit to one of the Third Bureau officers might involve an hour of wandering. Sometimes one met a stranger to G.Q.G., on liaison from the armies or from Paris, wandering in the maze, and anxiously trying to find out where he was. If he were too proud to ask his way, he had only till evening to find his way out; for the staircases, called after great names of the old days, led into interior courts without exits. Such an arrangement was the delight of orderlies and clerks, who could disappear without causing a search. The number of these officials increased, for the offices were at such a distance from one another that a regular courier service had to be organized to carry files about.

I have noticed that, the more spacious the accommodation placed at the disposal of the departments, the larger they grow, the farther they get separated from one another, and the less becomes the co-ordination between them. The water-tight doors got thicker. To fill empty rooms, officers and furniture were demanded. As I have said the number of messengers

was doubled, and as our telephone communications increased, so the telephone staff grew. The same Staff, which, with the exception of L. of C., was entirely housed in the modest Agricultural Institute at Beauvais, contrived to find itself cramped in the enormous Palace of Compiègne. As long as there is no fixed rule to limit the space to be occupied by Headquarters, Staffs will always be too large.

Having left Beauvais in a snowstorm, we arrived at Compiègne in a downpour of rain. The whole month of April was dreadful, and the Palace was icy cold. The barometer, facing the Apollo stairs in the great corridor on the first floor, pointed unchangingly to "stormy." Heaven knows it was often enough consulted. The date fixed for the offensive was drawing on. This barometer betrayed many secrets religiously kept by the Third Bureau. At lunch time it was sufficient to notice those who went up to it to get an inkling of what was going on. If a "brass hat" scowled as he looked at it, or if his face cleared as the curve traced by its recording pen rose, there was an attack in the offing.

Besides, on this occasion there was no need for perspicacity. Nobody took the trouble to conceal the date of the offensive. It was openly spoken of. I still wonder why so much frankness was displayed. It was known that bad weather was delaying the operation, and that the preliminary destruction was not finished. The very orderlies grew anxious at the weather, and shook their heads knowingly as they looked at the sky. It was in truth the first time that a projected offensive had been openly spoken of. Some secret relaxation of discipline existed in the matter. And perhaps of this sharing of anxiety the hope which inspired everybody was the keener.

If a certain discord existed in the High Command, it was not generally known in the departments till later, and if the Government was besieged with complaints by the fighting troops, as was subsequently disclosed, G.Q.G., outside its most important chiefs, were not aware of it at the time. The prestige of

General Nivelle among his Staff was unimpaired. The General betrayed great friendliness towards everybody, and was rewarded with a lively sympathy. For my part, I was rarely greeted with so cordial a welcome as during his reign, and encouragement was never grudged me. My humble duties received his careful attention, and he never failed to notice my efforts with a friendly word denoting his appreciation. The wordy warfare which followed as a result of April 16th showed that General Nivelle knew how to gain adherents. All those who were in touch with him, unless their love of truth was greater than their gratitude, have remained his upholders in spite of everything.

But after April 6th, the date of the famous meeting of the War Council at Compiègne, I saw clearly the difficulties which the General would encounter in the execution of his projects. These difficulties were still more clearly revealed to us about April 10th by the Information Officers attached to the Sixth and Fifth Armies. They repeated the words of a divisional general, to whom Colonel d'Alenson, explaining the operation on the relief map of the Chemin-des-Dames, had said, "We shall advance, there, there and there, and then there we are!" The divisional general had put his hand flat on the map, showing that everywhere it was the heights that were to be attacked, and had replied, "We may advance, or we may not."

In the same way one of our friends on the Staff of General Micheler told us of the unconcealed anxiety of his chief. He said that, in the presence of M. Clemenceau, Micheler had complained forcibly of General Mangin, who took no notice of his remarks, and prepared his attack with a foolhardiness which promised badly. M. Clemenceau replied harshly, "When a subordinate disobeys orders he should be broken, or one is no longer a chief."

I knew also that the Third Bureau was beginning to disapprove of the time selected for the attack. It seemed to these men, who were fully aware of the mistakes of organization and the difficulties of the task, impossible that it could be successful in the

terrible weather that continued day after day. They raised objections, and I learnt afterwards that Colonel Renouard, their chief, had endeavoured to escape responsibility by writing a letter to the Commander-in-Chief. This letter was never answered. Further, an officer of the department told me that it had disappeared from the record of April 16th, but that he possessed a copy.

Colonel d'Alenson continued to be the soul of the offensive. His iron will remained firm in the face of every difficulty, and his dominating manner broke all resistance. The orders which he drew up all bear the imperious tone which was typical of him. General Nivelle was of a more yielding nature. The note which he sent on April 5th to the generals in order to inspire them with confidence is of a seriously persuasive nature, and was surely composed by himself. Colonel d'Alenson would not have used such conciliatory phrases. To him was attributed the quarrel which had early arisen between Field-Marshal Haig and General Nivelle, and the imperative letters addressed to Generals Pétain and Anthoine. Colonel d'Alenson had the true gambler's temperament, as was proved by his reply to Colonel Fetizon, Deputy-Chief of the Third Bureau, a calm methodical man, of considerable common sense, who had asked, "And if we fail, what then?" D'Alenson replied, "Well, if we fail, we will throw our hands in."

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We certainly lived in a gambling atmosphere. The game that we were playing was that of the Commander-in-Chief and his friends, and not that of the General Staff. Captain Guillaume placed at his master's service all his cleverness and ingenuity. He entered into direct relations with the Press and telephoned to Marcel Hutin from his office. As the disorganized Information Section had no longer any connection with the papers, all this propaganda work was carried on behind its back. Captain Guillaume impressed into the service our colleague of the *Matin*, Nordmann, mobilized as a lieutenant in the artillery and devoted

to General Nivelle ; and the result was a prominent article in the *Matin* eulogizing the General's new method of attack.

On the eve of the offensive I telephoned to one of the Information Officers of the Sixth Army to arrange with him the times for sending in the next day's accounts, and asked him, " How goes it with you ? Are you pleased with yourselves ? " He merely grunted in a not very encouraging manner, which events were to justify.

However, we were very hopeful. This state of mind I have seen on the eve of every offensive, but rarely so intense as in this year. On the marked map in our office we studied the objectives and allowed ourselves to be carried away by our own imagination. We dreamed that the barrier was broken at last, marked the progress northwards and felt a foretaste of the joy that should be ours if the results came up to our expectations. In spite of our knowledge that the whole path of the offensive was strewn with difficulties, we expected a miracle. That famous moment which was to see the enemy's heart fail him, and the beginning of the rout, was it to come now ? I fancy that the whole of France was in the same state of expectancy. The war was drawing out intolerably, it was essential to put an end to it, every one would have given ten years of his life to see the dawn of victory. This war psychosis has been aptly called " obsidional fever " ; no phrase could better describe it, and I fancy that no Government would have been strong enough to stop the impending offensive. General Nivelle, however great his responsibility, was subjected to the instinctive pressure, the intoxication of this great mass of Frenchmen, enervated by delay, who awaited the miracle and demanded the end of the nightmare at any cost.

On April 16th hope was short lived. At eleven o'clock the Third Bureau had not yet sent in the accounts from the armies, although when operations had been in progress telegrams poured in hour after hour from the beginning of the attack. It was a bad sign. It was raining in torrents, a violent storm raged over Compiègne, and the barometer was at its lowest. I went

to the Third Bureau to find an ominous silence reigning. No information had been received, they told me ; but the first news was satisfactory. I knew that formula and had no hope of discovering what was happening. At such times I merely asked whether I should draw up a victorious *communiqué* or strike a prudent note, and what line our troops could be described as having reached. But they told me I had better wait for the evening *communiqué* before announcing results, as those known up to the present were too vague. An excellent device, now used for the first time, but subsequently of great use. Meanwhile it was evident that the advance was not commensurate with the desired results.

In the evening, in spite of the time that had elapsed, progress was no more marked. An attempt was made in the *communiqué* to emphasize the powerful resistance of the enemy, who had massed considerable forces. It was announced that we had occupied his front line between Soissons and Craonne, which was not strictly true, as in many places to the west of Craonne we had been driven back to our own trenches during the afternoon. But it was impossible to mention a single village as having been taken by us, although the district was thickly scattered with them. The attack upon Brimont had yielded no results ; we had scarcely been able to maintain our position along the Aisne canal, but in the plain towards Juvin-court we had contrived to reach the second line and to penetrate it slightly. The total of prisoners, happily fairly high, reassured Colonel d'Alenson, who found the *communiqué* not very brilliant, on the whole. Ten thousand prisoners, that would hearten the public ! It is true that the absence of captured guns spoilt the picture. It was true that our troops, not having reached the battery positions, were under fire, and that the next day would be a very difficult one. However, Colonel d'Alenson continued to hope obstinately. The Champagne attack was to begin on the 17th, at an early hour. The assault was to develop between Soissons and Rheims.

I took the *communiqué* to General Nivelle in his villa, and found him anxious. For the last month the General had lost the cheerfulness of his expression. His height seemed to grow less, and swellings marred the strong lines of his face. He was wearing heavy artillery boots which rendered his step heavier and as though dejected. His eyes were rarely lighted up, and his always grave expression had taken on a look of sadness. He read the *communiqué* carefully, as his habit was, and added a few words in his own hand. As I took it away, I noticed that he had abridged the passage relating to the enemies' forces, and that he had mechanically initialled the *communiqué* which he had never done before.

The news of the night which arrived on the 17th was bad. The enemy had counter-attacked in force, and we had lost ground. In the Laffaux sector, the first colonial force had been driven back into its own trenches ; we had lost Bermericourt and had retired towards Juvincourt. Our troops had experienced new German methods of warfare and especially of the counter-attack in depth. The Third Bureau was amazed. This time its officers did not endeavour to hide their opinions. What was happening ? What was the cause of the alarming success of the hostile counter-attacks ? Many expressed their fears that our troops were no longer as brave as hitherto. " They are no longer the soldiers of the Somme," they said. But in this they were unjust ; they as yet knew nothing of the excellent counter-measures taken by the enemy in the course of the offensive.

The Champagne offensive caused some satisfaction and allowed of the addition of the names of heights to the *communiqué*, but very soon it was found to be arrested in both wings. It was impossible to make any headway on the Aisne front, and artillery preparation was everywhere renewed.

On the evening of the 18th hope was renewed again. Mangin's army saw the enemy disappear before it ; and Mitry's corps announced in successive telegrams important captures of guns and material. We had taken

Ostel, Braye-en-Laonnois, Nanteuil-la-Fosse, and our troops continued to advance. This caused great rejoicings, and the officers of the Third Bureau amused themselves by bringing me telegrams from the Army one after another, to see the growth of my enthusiasm. They arrived crying "Five guns more, four, six, a hundred and eighty machine guns!" Serious hopes were entertained that the enemy retirement would spread over the whole of the front of attack, for since March 16th the only thing thought of was a concerted retreat. The information from the Front spoke of explosions and fires, and as these symptoms had preceded the retirement of March 16th, we awaited a similar event which should lead us as far as the Meuse.

But alas! the retreat soon came to an end. We took Jouy-Sancy, Aixy, Laffaux, which was announced on the 19th, and that was all. At the same time the capture of Fort Condé was announced which had been evacuated for two days, but which our troops had not yet occupied lest it should be mined. From this time forward, except for a few brilliant successes in the Moranvilliers sector, we gained the impression that the offensive was countered. We had taken twenty thousand prisoners and a hundred guns. The Germans triumphed openly in the Nauen wireless, after having displayed a lively anxiety on the first day, obvious through the wild self-praise of the first account. As usual, they endeavoured to make light of our success and declared that we had taken no more than seven thousand prisoners. This misstatement was too glaring. We asked the armies to send us the exact list of the prisoners in their hands, with the units to which they belonged. To our delight we found in the course of making this census that we had taken three thousand prisoners more than we had stated. The Germans alleged some excuse which justified their figure of seven thousand and let the matter drop.

It appeared that the offensive was over. The papers, which had begun by talking of victory in triumphant phrases, when they no longer received from the Information Section the food to support their enthusiasm,

went to other sources for themselves and made inquiries from the wounded who arrived in Paris and the troops who had taken part in the operations and had gone to rest in the Chalons and Epernay sectors. This produced a sudden change of tone, and the Press began to speak bitterly of the check to the offensive. The pessimistic attitude which a journalist adopts on such occasions is well known.

G.Q.G. had its eyes opened by this. It saw all at once that the Information Section had been of great use to it. The Third Bureau declared that it was a foolish thing to have thrown away so useful a tool, which had maintained public confidence at the time of the Somme and of Verdun. They criticized the weakness of General Pont, who had capitulated before the Press Bureau, an organization full of sceptics and incapable of guiding the Press aright. In the end all the blame was thrown upon Colonel Toutain, the immediate author of the disorganization of the branch. General Pont was surrounded and bombarded with suggestions. Colonel d'Alenson declared that at all costs the Information Section must be removed from Colonel Toutain's control and restored to its former dignity. There were secret confabulations between the Third Bureau and Captain Moulin, a clear-visioned and devoted man, one of the few professional soldiers who had realized the utility of the Press in war-time, and who controlled us under Colonel Toutain. The entourage took part in the discussion. General Pont decided that we should again be attached to the Second Bureau; and General Dupont gave our orders. Former officers who had been scattered over the various Staffs were recalled. We ventured to believe that we were delivered from the tyranny and obscurantist *régime* which had stifled us. But Colonel Toutain pretended to see nothing, to busy himself with the reorganization of our section, and gravely conferred with the Major-General, who dared say nothing to him. It was a most ridiculous affair.

An amazing adventure befel the Major-General shortly afterwards. One morning, as he was attend-

ing to the daily routine, he received a visit from General Debeney, who was the commander of the Seventh Army. Slightly surprised to see this officer, whom he had not sent for, he said to him with his usual cordiality, all the while dealing with files and signing papers, "What are you doing here? What lucky wind blew you in?"

"You see I've arrived," replied General Debeney. "How are you?"

"Splendid. What about you?"

It seemed that the conversation lasted in these vague terms for some while. Then at last, General Pont, much puzzled, asked his visitor: "Well, what can I do for you?"

"What, you mean to say that you don't know?" replied General Debeney. "Nothing has been said to you?"

"What about? What is it that has not been told me?"

"Why, that I am to replace you. I have been appointed Major-General. Look here."

And he showed him his letter of appointment.

A thunderbolt falling at the General's feet could not have astonished him more. He flew into a rage, leapt to his feet, declared that such a proceeding was unheard of, that he would not allow himself to be thrust aside in this way, since he had nothing to reproach himself with, that he should have had warning, and so on.

In fact such a brutal execution, so destitute of procedure, was a cruel action and an unwarranted injustice towards a man so devoted to duty as General Pont. But such is the way in the Army. Is it the effect of the good comradeship which exists between men so closely related, often since the Staff College or St. Cyr, and always working together for the same end? Not wishing to sadden their colleague by announcing their decision, they prefer to let changes take their own course. Is it the natural hardness of the soldier? Or is it rather the automatic working of the offices dealing with the process of changes?

I do not know. I have seen this unhappy procedure repeated on more than one occasion.

I am not sure if General Pont obtained any compensation for his supercession. I think he was appointed to the rank of divisional general and that he was given an Army Corps, but I cannot say for certain. What makes me think that he did not go with empty hands, is that he remarked *à propos* of General Pellé, who had to wait more than a year for his appointment as divisional general after his departure from G.Q.G., "Those things should be secured at once, before leaving; otherwise promises are never kept." As for General Pellé, his long and undeserved disgrace, all the more unjust since he became one of the most brilliant divisional commanders with acting rank, and achieved striking successes on the Chemin-des-Dames, was attributed to the ill will of an officer attached to the War Office who had the confidence of the Minister.

In reality, the replacement of General Pont, whatever good reason may have been assigned for it, was the beginning of a series of protective measures on the part of General Nivelle, who sought to retain his position in spite of the failure of his offensive. He threw out ballast, so to speak, and tried to shelve his responsibility. This cannot be doubted, and many incidents prove it. These precautions are discreditable to him, in my opinion, and detract from his reputation as a chief actuated by high purposes, though betrayed by Fortune. If he had thrown his hand in, to use the expression of his Chief of Staff, one day when he was well inspired, his departure would have left him a great but sad memory to his colleagues.

It is, however, certain that he made every endeavour to withstand the storm which he felt approaching; he cast himself recklessly into the intrigues, and made every effort to retain the supreme command. It is now known upon indisputable authority that he tried to get rid of Mangin. M. Painlevé has told how, on several occasions, he asked him to appoint Mangin to another post, that he even tried to get M. Maginot,

the Minister for the Colonies, to appoint Mangin Governor of Western Africa. Upon which M. Maginot, to my certain knowledge, replied that in the first place Mangin would not consent to go in the middle of a battle (which was quite right), and secondly that he did not care to send so active a man to a colony which had already caused him enough anxiety. Thereupon General Nivelle himself proposed to the Minister that his subordinate should be relieved of his command on the grounds that he had lost the confidence of his troops. But General Mangin, hearing of this, took up arms with that terrible energy of his and launched so violent an attack against his superior officer that he immediately restored his confidence in him. True, it was too late to avert the decision already taken by the Cabinet.

Meanwhile General Nivelle tried the same tactics towards General Micheler. This time, wishing to use persuasion, he went personally to Dormans, Micheler's headquarters. The latter was too astute not to see at once that the General was in search of a scapegoat; and he quite expected this visit. As soon as the General was announced, he opened wide all the windows looking towards the garden, so that his officers collected in the adjoining rooms could hear all that he should say. After the first few words he stopped the General, and in a loud voice that could be heard all over the house, he gave vent to what was on his mind. The scene was described to me by one of the officers who was there and did not lose a word. "It was a terrible business," he said. "We did not know where to hide ourselves."

"General!" cried Micheler. "You are about to commit an infamous action. You wish to make responsible for this mistake, me who never ceased to warn you of it. Do you know what such an action is called? Well, it is called cowardice!"

General Nivelle left the room hurriedly and got into his car without anyone coming out to see him into it. My informant told me that he staggered like a drunken man.

He made fresh attempts among his political friends, and these procured him the support of M. Malvy. Now, if it is remembered that General Nivelle had been warned against this Minister some time before by the officers of his postal censorship, it is all the more surprising to find him making common cause with him. M. Malvy, in fact, had been definitely accused by the Director of Morale, M. Gaston Bruyant and his chief, Lieutenant Jaques Duval, of shutting his eyes to the proceedings of the *défaitists* who were attempting a campaign of demoralization in the Army. The patriotism of these officers was too great not to make it their first duty to inform the Commander-in-Chief of their suspicions, since they allowed themselves to say to their friends in moments of greater exasperation than usual, "Malvy ought to be sent to prison." However this may be, it was M. Malvy's intervention which, on two occasions, prevented the Cabinet from resolving on General Nivelle's disgrace and succeeded in delaying it for some days.

His efforts were useless, General Nivelle was irrevocably condemned. General Pétain, appointed Chief of the General Staff at the end of April, was unmistakably destined as his successor. Nivelle still hoped to maintain himself when it was already known at Compiègne that the change was imminent. During the ten days before the event took place, a few brilliant successes were gained on the Chemin-des-Dames. The General's entourage endeavoured to stimulate the Press to enthusiasm. I heard Captain Guillaume telephoning to Marcel Hutin in the warmest tones. "Is that you, old man?" he said; "I have some wonderful news for you to-day. We hold the Chemin-des-Dames on a front of forty kilometres." By his side General Debeney was reading the *communiqué* which I had just brought to him with that cold clarity and strong common sense which were typical of him. He raised his head in astonishment. "Gently, Guillaume," he exclaimed. "Don't go too far."

In the Third Bureau the bad days of General Joffre's disgrace had returned. Pétain appeared on the hori-

zon with Foch in his wake. Pétain and Foch, the two men so cunningly dropped in 1916! The "Young Turks" felt that their days were numbered. But, like good players, masters of their feelings, experienced in dissimulating their true opinions, they affected perfect serenity.

General Nivelle's departure was made unostentatiously. Rarely had a Commander-in-Chief disappeared from the scene amid so much indifference. As a matter of fact, he had already ceased to exist in everybody's eyes. The true master was awaited with undisguised impatience. The day on which his arrival at Compiègne was announced, a thrill of joy ran through the whole organization, except perhaps the Third Bureau. The prestige he carried with him was almost supernatural. Arriving almost alone in his car, he had practically passed unnoticed, when it was announced that he was coming up the avenue leading from the Palace to the Rond-Royal. Several officers ran out hastily in the hope of seeing him, but they were disappointed; he had already disappeared.

With General Nivelle went Colonel d'Alenson and his orderly officers. Their first residence was Senlis, the stellenbosch of the Front. Colonel d'Alenson, sick, worn out with work, very shortly went on leave. He died at his own home less than two months later of ill-health, but also of disappointment. His death struck me as very sad. Of all the actors in this war of position he was, in my eyes, the most original. He was a romantic figure, consumed with ambition, hardly to be measured by our ordinary standards. This silent man, for long modest and retiring, suddenly resolved to tempt Fortune with a spirit and a will worthy of the days when adventurers carved out kingdoms for themselves. By his strength of will, his inspired enthusiasm, his facility in dealing with great events, he always reminded me of a Napoleon devoid of genius.

Among the men who relinquished their power at this time, special mention must be made of Colonel Renouard. I have frequently had occasion to speak

of this brilliant officer, who possessed intelligence and character in the highest degree. Was he involved in this disgrace and made more or less responsible for the failure of April 16th, or was his departure merely brought about by the fact that Pétain brought with him the pick of those who had served with him? I dare not express an opinion, lest I be mistaken. But his departure was the occasion for a manifestation of sympathy which was to his credit. The whole of the Third Bureau, which he had led for two years, conducted him as far as the station. This surprising faithfulness, so contrary to the custom of the Staff, says much for the prestige of Colonel Renouard and the devotion with which he had inspired his subordinates.

In the days to come, I often saw General Renouard at Compiègne, which shows that the new Chief looked favourably upon him. He was appointed to the command of a division, and did splendidly in the hard fighting of March and April, 1918. His unit, heavily tried and in course of reconstruction, was holding a sector of the Chemin-des-Dames in May. It was one of those which bore the terrible and unexpected onslaught of the enemy on the 27th. Carried away by his ardour, General Renouard counter-attacked with his division, with perhaps excessive boldness. Overwhelmed by numbers, the division was almost entirely destroyed or taken prisoner. General Renouard, profoundly distressed by this disaster, died of influenza at Dormans shortly afterwards, without having seen the dawn of that victory for which he had worked so hard.

PART III
THE AFTERMATH
OF FAILURE



CHAPTER I

The Accession of Pétain

I HAVE now reached the crucial point of my story. From Pétain's arrival dates a new era for the General Staff. It is the greatest honour of my life to have worked under this great man, who will be regarded by our descendants as "The Organizer of Victory." Until then, it seemed to me that events had led men, that the actors in the drama were inferior to the drama itself. It was a great epoch without great men. The nameless names of combatants alone reached epic heights.

France certainly contained men of talent, but no one had yet appeared, capable of taking in the situation at a glance, of estimating it, of pitting himself against it. All lacked some indefinable yet simple quality in their view of the future, the gift of discerning the things of true importance, the calmness of judgment which, neglecting appearances, detects the truth.

Pétain appealed to me not only as a soldier. His greatness was not confined to his capability for directing battles, but emanated from his very self. None approached nearer than he to what the Latins termed "Great Men." He was the thinker and the wise man as well as the leader of men.

One morning, a few days after his arrival, as I was talking to his orderly officer, I by chance raised my eyes. I saw him standing in the doorway looking at us, calm and motionless. I had the impression of a marble statue, of a Roman senator in a museum. Big, vigorous, of imposing figure, impassive face and pale complexion, with a direct and thoughtful glance, he was a majestic sight in his blue uniform. Those

who have seen him watching thus the troops passing before him in some big review at the Front know how correct this picture is.

I had come to ask his orderly officer, Lieutenant Thierry (son of the former Minister, who died in 1918, while Ambassador at Madrid), if the General would see next day M. Henri Simond, the editor of the *Echo de Paris*. The orderly officer had told me that the General would probably make no exception in favour of anyone, that he disliked interviews, but that, as in all cases, my request should be transmitted to him. I left without hearing the result, but I had scarcely got back to my office when I received a telephone call to say that the Commander-in-Chief wished to see me.

The General greeted me with that kindness which he could so well assume, showed me in a few words that he knew all about me, and concluded by saying: "I shall be very glad to have a talk with M. Henri Simond. The *Echo de Paris*, although very well disposed, does not give just now a very true idea of the war, like most papers, for that matter. The Press must prepare the country for the truth as to the duration of the war and the efforts still to be made. I will see M. Henri Simond in Paris. Let him come to my office at the Invalides." He fixed a day and time, and I left him.

Such was my first interview with General Pétain. Already part of the legend was exploded. The original and bitter old fellow despising politicians and journalists, as he was made out to be, only existed in the stories of gossips. It appeared that he wished to drop his habitual reserve because he felt that his new duties entailed new obligations. I am not sure that he did well. I have been told that this interview was satisfactory neither to M. Henri Simond nor to the General. The latter spoke with the frankness that a Chief endowed with so great a responsibility should exhibit towards a great leader of public opinion—that is to say, that he did not draw up a cheerful picture of the situation, did not tell him that he undertook to achieve victory by the end of the year; on the

contrary, he laid stress upon the power of the enemy and the difficulty of the task, and added that it was no use feeding the public with false hopes or encouraging them to expect a miracle. M. Henri Simond believed that the General was of a pessimistic nature, and said so to his entourage. The General was told this, and was painfully surprised. After that he took care to avoid interviews.

Men like those who confirm them in their illusions. Nivelle had delighted the War Committee in London by declaring that he would advance twenty-five kilometres a day into the enemy lines. Even after his failure many people regretted the man who had given birth to so many hopes. Whoever wishes to pass for a great leader must put a rosy complexion on everything and promise the moon. Then it is said that he has confidence, that quality which optimists lack the most and for which they seek unremittingly.

CHAPTER II

The Mutinies

BY the irony of Fate, the Chief who was adored by the troops was at the outset of his reign to be put to the most searching test a leader can undergo, that of mutiny.

Suddenly, at the beginning of June, sinister news arrived at G.Q.G. A regiment ordered to the front line had sent delegates to their Colonel to inform him that they refused to obey. At the same time, similar incidents occurred in other units. In one place a collection of mutineers had fortified a village, formed a soviet, appointed a leader, and set up a sort of independent government. They took provisions from the shopkeepers by regularly drawn up requisition forms. Their delegates imposed conditions on the officers: increase of pay, regular leave periods, and assurances that assaults should not take place before the destruction of the enemy's trenches and wire. In another place a general had been hustled and assaulted. Elsewhere, a regiment equipped with motor lorries, on which were mounted machine-guns, had been stopped in the attempt to march on Paris. They had stated their intention of going to the Palais-Bourbon and presenting their demands to Parliament. These manifestations of revolt were accompanied by seditious shouts of "Down with the war!" "Down with incapable leaders!" And the red flag was displayed.

In truth, the simultaneous outbreaks of these mutinies in a number of units made it seem as though we were confronted with a vast plot, secretly contrived and prepared beforehand. Many alarming details

were adduced. In one division the officers had noticed nothing; the men had only congregated in groups of three or four. In another, the leaders of the mutinies had rigorously forbidden alcohol to their followers, in order that they should not be taken for delirious drunkards. The mutiny was carried out in an orderly manner, as though according to exact instructions. Nowhere was any bloodshed reported. The officers, although no longer obeyed, were still, with rare exceptions, respected. They were told: "You have fought as well as we; we do not wish you any harm, but we have had enough. The war must stop." These scenes broke out in sixteen army corps, simultaneously or at short intervals.

The Third Bureau raged against the infamous political agitators, the syndicalists, and the Government, which was guilty of allowing the ringleaders to demoralize the Army, in spite of frequent warnings. On this subject I had a discussion with a young officer of the Bureau, which degenerated into a dispute. I fully admitted that the *défaitist* propaganda of the wretches who strove to discourage men on leave in Paris, in the workmen's clubs, in stations and trains, and even in the regiments themselves, had influenced the mutinies, but that it seemed to me that the ground had been prepared by the fiasco of April 16th. Granted that this revolutionary propaganda was at its height at the time, I still maintained that action must not be limited to seeking for traces of a politico-revolutionary plot, and believing that once the ringleaders in the Army and the country were discovered and shot, the mutiny would be over. It was above all necessary to realize that we were confronted with a military sedition, a sort of professional strike, such as leaders have had to contend with in all countries and every age, and we must ascertain its cause in order to suppress it. Was not Cæsar frequently obliged to calm his troops, exasperated by winter, protracted labours, and the bad administration of peculating generals? What course did he follow? He put the ringleaders to

death, as an example, but also he distributed corn to the rest, lavished praise upon them, rested them, and promised them in the near future the glory and rewards of valour.

Not to perceive that the soldier required moral care, to appreciate only the political side of the question, was to invite serious disappointment. If a revolutionary plot existed, could it be believed that the troops would have maintained the dignified attitude which they had assumed, in spite of all? Would they not have risen with arms in their hands? Instead of an agitation among scattered units, would there not have been collusion between all the units? Would not some leader have arisen who would have co-ordinated the actions of the mutineers, and seized some town as his headquarters, whence he would have sent out his agents? The troops had never known better how to organize themselves; for the trouble lay largely among old and seasoned troops who had taken part in the battle of April 16th.

But, relying upon the reports of the Postal Control, this young officer declared that, without the instigation of which he possessed proofs, the mutiny would not have taken place. The instigators once suppressed, all would be over.

It will be as well at this stage to study this important and much-discussed organization which was known as the Postal Control. There is no more useful institution, but at the same time none is more dangerous when it is improperly understood. I have always been greatly interested in the question, which is purely a psychological one. As I was closely connected with the organization of this service, especially at the beginning, I am in a position to say a good deal about it.

* * * * *

In the winter of 1915-16, at Chantilly, a serious event occupied all General Pellé's attention. As a useful propaganda measure, and to reassure the soldiers' families, alarmed by the prospect of a second winter in the trenches, the Major-General instructed

me to prepare several articles explaining the precautions taken by the Command to guard against the cold. He told me that the Third Bureau had the reports from the armies in which were detailed the various comforts introduced for the benefit of the troops. They should be made known to the public. I was consequently given the report drawn up by the Fifth Army, and it amazed me. Everywhere ingenious drainage systems carried off the water from the trenches, which were paved with duck-boards; weatherproof dug-outs fitted with stoves and shelters with braziers had been constructed. I was shown a photograph of a washing-place fitted with hot water two hundred yards from the front line. The camps had lamps and mattresses. An officer told me that he had seen look-outs carrying hot bricks into the listening-posts. A profusion of woollen clothing, sheepskins, rubber-boots, and sabots was available. Hot drinks were distributed. In short, there was absolute comfort. The Third Bureau asked that all this information should be made public. That would help to silence the idiots who declared that the Command was doing nothing for the troops. That I may not be accused of exaggeration, here are extracts from the report in question.

FIFTH ARMY.

HEADQUARTERS, *Dec. 5th, 1915.*

REPORT TO THE GENERAL HEADQUARTERS.

The existence of our men at the Front in the second winter campaign.

Will the winter be severe? Will not the men at the Front suffer from the cold? Have all possible measures for their comfort been provided? These are questions which for three months the whole country has been asking with a solicitude even more lively than last year.

These apprehensions are easily allayed. Last winter gave us some valuable lessons. Ask the *poilus* who

lived in the trenches from November, 1914, to the spring of 1915; every man appreciates the measures which were taken against cold. Consult also the statistics of the Medical Service, in which sickness attributable to cold and rain appears in relatively small figures.

With the experience thus gained, even better results should be achieved this winter. Our Command has not overlooked the matter. Examining the question as a whole, it has not only attempted to provide against cold, but has also applied itself to improve the general conditions of the troops at the approach of winter. The following is a short account of the measures taken in the Fifth Army.

The essential question of the feeding of the troops has naturally been the first concern; but it is in this direction that the smallest changes have been necessary.

While the enemy provides even his front-line men with only one meal at midday, leaving them to buy food for themselves in the evening or to be content with an issue of coffee, our soldiers have always enjoyed two substantial meals a day.

For several weeks the full ration of meat has been allowed to the units most exposed to fatigue, and in cold weather this measure will become general. The distribution of hot drinks, tea and coffee, and of alcohol in suitable quantity, already frequent, will become regular when the temperature requires. This issue is facilitated by the field kitchens with which all corps are now provided, and which are most useful when the troops are in position as well as on the march. The quality of the rations, always carefully watched, will during the winter be still more carefully supervised.

Troops of all arms have received the new steel helmets and are very pleased with them. They are of good appearance, form an excellent protection for the head against shrapnel and shell splinters, and will be greatly appreciated in snow and rain storms.

As ever, boots have been the object of particular

attention. The smallest units have repair shops which allow them to be kept constantly in good order. Ample distribution of socks and puttees are now being made. To these are carefully added thousands of pairs of special winter boots: simple and efficient trench boots and solid wooden sabots. Sabot-makers have been established in many camps, and manufacture these excellent foot-coverings, whose utility amply compensates for their appearance.

Having had time to send out requisitions in good time and to ensure regular supplies, the issue of woollen and other clothes was completed even before the cold weather had begun. The troops are now fully provided with mufflers, socks, warm drawers, etc., supplied by the State.

A muffled-up *poilu*, wading up to his knees in a flooded trench, but laughing at his lot and exchanging some jest with his neighbour, was the favourite subject last winter for the pencil of the comic artist. Will it be true again this winter? Certainly cheerfulness and good spirits are not lacking in our troops, the Boche shells having only served to develop this humour. What is most likely to become a rarity is a flooded trench. . . .

In every sector considerable works have been carried out with the object of drying the trenches and facilitating the drainage of water. Wood in billets or slats, or even slabs of cork, have been laid on the carefully levelled soil. Under these or at their sides deep gutters collect rain or percolating water and carry it to sumps. Suction pumps allow of its being deposited thence in places where it can cause no inconvenience.

In soft ground, firmly fixed revetments keep up the parapet of the trenches and prevent their caving in after frost or rain.

Such works will serve to alleviate the existence of their occupants. It need therefore cause no astonishment to find that a regiment from the South has given the name *Cannebière* to the principal way in its sector. Etc., etc.

I set to work eagerly and wrote an article which one of the big morning papers published in a leading position. I suggested a film scenario in which soldiers should be seen making duck-boards, putting braziers in shelters, erecting wire mattresses, coming to the sabot-maker, and so on. The suggestion was adopted and the cinematograph service set out for a certain allotted sector in the Fifth Army. But the article had scarcely appeared when we received from the B.M.I. a frantic telephone message. Two hundred thousand indignant letters had reached the newspapers in three days from every part of the Front! Exasperated soldiers insisted that they were wading in mud and water, that they lacked warm clothing, that they had neither hot food nor hot drinks, that they had not washed for weeks for want of clean water, that their camp had not enough straw, let alone stoves or lamps, and so forth. It was, in short, a violent revelation of the sufferings in less favoured sectors, which were far more numerous than was believed.

The Fifth Army, although life in it was not so idyllic as the report suggested, was in particularly favourable circumstances. The quiet which it had enjoyed for some months had allowed of work being carried out; the nature of the subsoil, a porous chalk, assured fairly rapid draining and allowed of the construction of dug-outs. But in Picardy, Artois, Belgium, Champagne, and the Woëvre circumstances did not permit of such measures. Further, although on paper the orders for stoves, lamps, and wire mattresses looked well, the Supply Branch declared that of the 200,000 beds ordered, hardly 50,000 had been delivered; of 300,000 stoves, 150,000 were deficient; and other things in proportion. It was the fault of the makers, the War Office, the Treasury. . . . But what a dangerous mistake, among all the reports, to publish that which gave the rosiest view of the situation, and to slur over mistakes and deficiencies!

The immediate result of this incident was the hastening of deliveries, and in this respect it was

useful. But it struck me that if the Command was thus badly informed, it was because all the way up the scale the pill was gilded for it. Reports were always more or less false. Why not use the Postal Control to give the Command information as to the welfare of the troops? For example, if in a thousand letters from the same Army complaints were found of the badness of the wine, the fact can be taken as established. If the Command is made aware of it, it is easy for it to remedy the negligence of the supply services. But to do this, a centralization of the Postal Control offices had to be organized, as these offices up to the present had worked on a somewhat haphazard system, and without co-ordination. They must be given directions and instructions, and connected directly with G.Q.G.

Further, if we were warned through the Postal Control that rumours destructive of morale were circulating at the Front, it would be possible, by the insertion of articles in the Press, to deny these stories and combat the evil. The Information Section would for this purpose be in perpetual communication with this centralized service.

General Pellé was greatly pleased with the idea. It came to me partly through an officer of Registry, Lieutenant Jacques Duval, a writer and lecturer, who, severely wounded and not equal to the hard work of the Registry, wished for a change of occupation. He suggested himself as the man for this central service. Already, in his spare time, he had drawn up a report which summarized the sketchy reports which arrived monthly from the various controls, in an attempt to deduce some general principle from the thousands of scraps of information. General Pellé, at my request, entrusted him definitely with this duty, and attached him to both the Information Section and the Intelligence Department.

Some time later, perceiving that on the *questionnaires* of the Postal Control as laid down by an old regulation appeared a column headed "Political Opinions of the Troops," I informed General Pellé. In considerable

astonishment he questioned Colonel Zoppf, the Chief of the Intelligence Department, who replied that it had always been so, and that there was no authority for changing it, especially as it was of assistance to discipline and to the watching of suspects. Nothing could be more correct from the disciplinary point of view; but under the circumstances it would not do for the Information Section, engaged in relations with the Press, to have dependent upon it a service which concerned itself with the political opinions of the troops. Such a thing might give rise to damaging interpretations. From that time the Postal Control was attached to the Intelligence Department alone.

Lieutenant Duval, through his influence, developed his service until it reached considerable proportions. He reorganized the Postal Control bureaux and drew up for them a scheme of procedure. He soon had under his orders two or three hundred wounded or light-duty officers, who worked in perfect collaboration. Rarely was a service better directed by a man so devoted to his duties. I have known Lieutenant Duval pass all his nights in examining the innumerable reports he received, trying to discover a similarity between them, to discern the true state of the men's minds. I fancy that the discovery of the pacifist ideas which certain unscrupulous agitators tried to instil into the Army was due to him, although he maintained complete silence as to his work.

But he willingly discussed the principles he followed with me. A psychological problem confronted him, which was bound to interest literary people. I have always maintained, in this connection, that considerable care must be taken in estimating the sentiments expressed by the soldiers in their letters, and that direct conclusions should not be drawn from them. The man writing to his people is surrounded by bad conditions. He is alone, nobody sees him; he writes to his intimates, to whom he can say everything, to whom he is not afraid of exhibiting his failings in their ugliest aspect.

Usually, pen in hand, he is carried away by the

memory of his former well-being. He pours out his bitterness, expresses his sufferings, boredom, and disgust. And this is true, except in the case of men of superior minds, who, on the contrary, hide their wretchedness from their people for fear of worrying them. In this great country of France, the latter are less rare than is thought. But it is obvious that in their case also their words must not be taken as the expression of their thoughts, blind belief must not be placed in the high spirits they reveal, and it must not be assumed that they are happy.

The true man only reveals himself through his comrades, when the general impression reacts upon him, when his *amour-propre* exerts itself and he plays his part as a unit of society. He is no longer the same; he is a different man, usually better, sometimes worse. Rousseau in his *Confessions* has revealed to us the baseness, the neurasthenia of the lonely man.

The Postal Control should thus form its opinion less upon the ideas and feelings expressed in letters than on the incidents from which these feelings spring. And even in this generalizations should not be too rigid. For example, from twenty letters acknowledging the receipt of a *défaitist* leaflet, and from a thousand others expressing a desire for peace or anger against the existing condition of things, can one deduce that the disgust of the thousand proceeds from those who have also read leaflets? It is easy to see the error into which one may fall: of attributing to an accidental cause a condition which is the result of more general conditions.

I can affirm that G.Q.G. immediately attributed the discontent of the Army to the agitators and their leaflets and brochures. There was too great a tendency to consider men as units, as automata obeying external impulses. Every time that the troops showed a common state of mind, attempts were made to discover who was inspiring it. They seemed to overlook the fact that ideas and opinions can arise spontaneously in minds and hearts in the face of certain events.

* * * * *

We had reason to think that, in the present case, the action of the anti-patriots and *défaitists* had on the whole little to do with the matter. Information officers had visited their old units, of which some had taken part in the movement. One of them, an officer of chasseurs, on excellent terms with his men, who were also from the same part of France, declared, after a detailed investigation, that the mountaineers of Haute-Savoie had not had the slightest intercourse with the *défaitist* agents. This is how the mutiny began in his battalion. I quote his words, as they seem to me to be applicable to the majority of cases.

In the first place, an unsatisfactory commander, whom the men rarely saw and who did not trouble himself about their comfort. In the second, a certain carelessness in the issue of rations and in the arrangement of the leave roster, of which the more cunning were always ready to take advantage. Then the feeling that the country was forgetting them, in spite of the nonsensical flattery which the newspapers heaped upon them; the letters which they received spoke of shirkers, every village contained a certain number, and even if really unfit, the man at home was suspected of shirking; the men who had been on leave reported that in rear of the armies nobody worried, and they were not far wrong.

On the other hand, they observed the fierce determination of the civil population and the great papers; those daily articles in which the offer of peace was described as a snare which must be avoided showed that there was only one way out for them, to beat the Boche. For this purpose a marvellous offensive was in preparation; a wonderful method, the Mangin-Nivelle scheme, was spoken of, and advertised as being about to lead to a complete and decisive victory. The Boche retreat in March seemed to them a preliminary symptom of the coming end of their troubles. The troops were fired with unprecedented enthusiasm. "We are going to have a good go at them, jump on the enemy with all our strength, and put an end to the business at last." Then the offensive was launched.

These brave men were stopped short everywhere, were massacred without being able to advance any further than on other occasions. The same machine-guns, the same barbed wire, stopped them. Not only was no progress made in the science of attack; but it even seemed that the dispositions were worse than ever. These were old soldiers, it must be remembered, who knew all about war and could not be imposed upon. If they had failed this time, then they would never succeed. The Boches would not break through, but no more should we. Why should we be expected to be more cunning than they? The Boche fought well. Who should know this better than soldiers who were always fighting him? All that was said about the demoralization of the enemy was rubbish. Let the no-surrender people from the rear come and try their hands!

But they must continue to attack, to take one trench after another, without any result but a terrible casualty list. Was the nibbling to begin again? And in fact it did begin again on the Chemin-des-Dames. How long was this to last? Are we all destined to perish for nothing? Let peace be made immediately, since our leaders are not capable of leading us to victory! But this will never be done by the people in the rear, who will not dream of peace because they are not called upon to fight. Very well, the soldiers have had enough; they will say what they think. One evening, when they have drunk more than usual to divert their minds when they are out of the trenches, the order comes to go back to the line. The disaffected say, "We will not go!" and the rest follow their example. So the battalion is in a state of mutiny. Here and there men appeared at this moment who were already contaminated, former syndicalists or pacifists who remembered their theories and who cried "Down with the war!" and raised the red flag. But in the majority of units things happened as I have stated, and always at the moment when the unit was ordered into the line to resume the irksome warfare of the trenches. It was not because the

offensive had been stopped, as certain arm-chair strategists, who think that battle alone gives courage to the soldier, have held, that the mutiny took place. To say such things is to ignore the world. It must not be forgotten that we were still attacking, by fits and starts, after the failure of the offensive; that the enemy was on the defensive. When did the mutiny come to an end? As soon as the Germans in turn took the offensive in July. Then the same divisions which had shown signs of weariness, pulled themselves together to defend their country, to retain at all costs that bit of French soil which they had captured at the price of their blood.

But in the meanwhile a true leader, one in whom the soldiers had always had confidence, whom they demanded and who had known how to talk to them, had appeared: Pétain.

General Pétain demanded before everything else that the Government should take certain police measures to protect the men on leave and at the Front from anarchist and *défaitist* propaganda. Then he furnished himself with a legal weapon by securing the suppression of the right of appeal in the case of individuals condemned for incitement and rebellion in the presence of the enemy. These were evidently the first precautions to be taken. Already, on February 28th, General Nivelle had complained of similar things: the presence of men on leave at pacifist meetings, propaganda at the stations, distribution of leaflets and brochures, the anti-patriotic action of workers in factories delaying production, all the facts revealed by the Postal Control and the researches of the *Service du moral*. General Nivelle achieved nothing. The evil was not of recent date, but it must be allowed that it was only after the failure of the offensive that these ferments reacted upon the troops.

In connection with this *Service du moral*, it was said at the time of the proceedings against Malvy and the *Bonnet Rouge* that such a service had never been in operation at G.Q.G., and that the Government had no knowledge of it. I believe, as a matter of fact, that

it was through the private initiative of the Intelligence Department that this service was instituted. At this time, Colonel Zoppf placed at the head of this department Lieutenant Bruyant, until then Lieutenant Duval's assistant in the Postal Control. Everybody at G.Q.G. remembered having seen a notice on the door of one of the rooms on the fourth floor of the Palace of Compiègne, bearing the words "*Service du moral.*" Every week, on Tuesday, if I remember right, Lieutenant Bruyant went to Paris. Having always had a great liking for politics, he apparently took his duties to heart and set himself to watch all Members of Parliament suspected of pacifism. I am almost sure that he communicated all his hypotheses, views, deductions, and generalizations to certain quarters in Paris, to a far greater extent than he revealed them to the Command. He is responsible for exposing the political origin of the mutinies.

As soon as Colonel Toutain became head of the Intelligence Department he suppressed this service.

* * * *

But General Pétain knew that it was principally the morale of the troops that was affected. He constituted himself the Army's doctor. He took to the road at once, and for a month his car with the white pennon travelled along the Front. He visited ninety divisions, inquiring everywhere into the situation, first with the commanders, then with the junior officers and N.C.O.'s, listening to all. Old soldiers summoned to his presence, questioned as to their grievances, spoke freely to him. While energetically denouncing the monstrous crime of mutiny in the presence of the enemy, and declaring that he would be merciless towards it, he declared that he would rectify the abuses brought to his notice. He said that he had always kept his word, and at this the men readily nodded in agreement. He asked the officers to live with their men and be their moral supporters. His prestige, his authority, his masterful attitude, which are his natural attributes and have the power to rally flagging energies, everywhere had their effect

upon the troops and their leaders. It was direction that was wanted. The Army had an obscure impression that everything was left to chance, and had become discouraged. But as soon as he appeared, it was felt that a firm hand was at the helm.

That Pétain was adored by the troops is a well-known fact. The honours several times decreed him by the Government were all tokens of this privilege due to his own personality. From this a conventional idea of him arose. He was imagined to be fatherly, cheerful, in turn familiar and tender. When he was appointed Marshal of France, the papers published ridiculous comments on these lines. Nothing could be less true. Never did Pétain cease to be himself in the presence of his troops. No familiarity, no fatherly affectation, no display of sentiment; for such do not deceive the soldier for a moment. He remained calm and imposing, a true Commander-in-Chief wielding sovereign authority. He spoke as a man to men, dominating them with his prestige, without trying to put himself on a lower level, as do those who form a false picture of the people. But there was such sincerity and seriousness in his tone, he seemed so absolutely honest, just, and human, that nobody doubted his word. The General derived all his strength, in fact, from his humanity. He loathed sentimentality, but he was never able to meet an ambulance without emotion.

In a month all traces of mutiny were wiped out, not only in the attitude of the troops, but in their hearts. The number of executions were reduced to a minimum—about ten in all. The General proceeded to carry out his promises. He improved camping grounds, constructed camps for leave-men, regularized the leave roster, published a guide for them when travelling, investigated rations. From day to day the troops perceived the change. In the hard fighting of July on the Chemin-des-Dames, which the Germans attacked vigorously in the belief that the French Army was disintegrating, he did not fear to make use of divisions which had mutinied. These

brave men wiped out even the memory of their defection by their heroic conduct.

But General Pétain did not limit his efforts to this. He sought continually the means of sustaining the morale of the troops in thinking out rewards, such as badges of distinction, which introduced such wonderful emulation among the regiments. It was his constant preoccupation. I have seen Colonel Serrigny employed for months in the solution of these problems. The boldest plans did not alarm him. At one time he even considered the possibility of giving the man on leave from the Front the right to a small ration of alcohol, in order that he might not be subject to the restrictions enforced throughout the country, and should as a fighting man have certain privileges.

When it was a matter of touching the human spring, of investigating psychology, General Pétain turned readily to the literary men who served as officers on his Staff. Captain Henry Bordeaux and Lieutenant Madelin were often consulted by him. All that concerned men, their passions and feelings, was the object of his attention. He asked them to carry out historical investigations for his exclusive use. Madelin, at the time of the mutiny, investigated the similar occurrences which had taken place during the troubles of the Revolution and the means employed to stamp them out.

Further, General Pétain announced that he was about to publish, in the *Bulletin des Armées*, a series of five articles signed by himself, "Why we are fighting." He also proposed to talk thus at intervals to his soldiers on everything concerning the war. The first article appeared. But it is difficult to imagine the consternation which this decision caused in political circles. The article passed from the censorship to the President of the Council, from him to the Press Department of the War Office, and returned to the President of the Council. It certainly contained nothing subversive, but it was scrutinized line by line to find a dangerous word or phrase. They asked themselves in alarm what the country would think

of this general turned journalist ; whether Parliament would not be displeased ; whether the Socialists would not protest. At the bottom of their thoughts was this : " Would he not become too popular ? " All the more since the Press made an immense success of the article. All the newspapers reproduced it on their principal page. It was suggested that perhaps he had better not continue. It do not know how far these suggestions went. But it is a curious thing that the man who most strongly opposed this innovation was Colonel Serrigny. He was so excessively clever, so anxious to be diplomatic and subtle, that he overreached himself. The article was never followed by others, which was a pity, for I am sure that they would have had excellent results.

For my own part, I have always supposed that a rather peculiar reason swayed Colonel Serrigny in this. The General had not asked the advice of his *chef de cabinet*, which was quite in accordance with his independence of mind. The idea had come to him, he had summoned Lieutenant Madelin, for whom he had a great regard, had asked him for a few notes, and had set to work. Colonel Serrigny was, I think, hurt by the preference shown to Lieutenant Madelin. This was quite like him, for he was very jealous of his influence. He had a curious feminine trait in his nature which made him sensitive of slights. One day at mess, before the war correspondents who were guests, speaking of himself in some connection, in an excess of childish vanity he used the surprising words, " Cæsar's wife should be above suspicion." A curious lapse of a mind remarkably subtle and clear. It was amusing to see Colonel Serrigny mounting guard over the Commander-in-Chief's door. No one entered the Chief's room without first running the gauntlet, and he it was who decided whether or not the matter was sufficiently important. Obviously a necessary precaution ; it would not do for the Commander-in-Chief to be constantly liable to interruption. But for all that, it was easy to see the power possessed by the holder of the key to the Holy of Holies. Very often,

when a visitor was introduced, the *chef de cabinet* remained and took part in the conversation. This is the sort of thing that annoys a Staff, and leads to friction between people in high places. It is true that in the case of a man of Colonel Serrigny's ability, these proceedings were carried out extremely tactfully. But for all that, he had no need to be present to know all that was said in his master's room.

CHAPTER III

Trial Operations

UNDER Pétain the soldier in the field regained confidence. In his training a fresh ardour was instilled into him, and he understood that his power of attack was being increased. He saw works being carried on without intermission. The gigantic ordnance of the heavy artillery and the railway guns appeared as fast as they were made. The officers received something upon which to exercise their wits in their instructions to learn everything possible about the enemy. Finally, the reduction of losses to a minimum by careful artillery preparation, the precautions taken, the careful avoidance of useless attacks and frequent reliefs, allowed the combatants time to breathe.

During the battle of Flanders, the First Army, commanded by General Anthoine, on the left of the English, met with no failure. Heavily massed artillery opened the way for our troops, who incurred trifling losses, and very often made more prisoners than they sustained casualties. Once in the captured position, the troops, protected by barrages, had no longer to endure the terrible hostile fire which hitherto had exacted such a price for success. It was after the battle of Flanders that General Anthoine came to G.Q.G. as Major-General in succession to General Debeney. This change took place once more with the lack of ceremony usual at Headquarters, and which I have already noticed in the case of General Pont. The Chief might change, but the proceedings did not alter, which shows the power of the departments and the force of habit.

I have the circumstances from General Debeney's orderly officer, Captain Viallard, a retired officer who

had rejoined during the war and who, having perhaps forgotten the customs of the Army, was highly indignant. The matter is worth describing.

On the day of General Debeney's departure, in November, 1917, I think, I met Captain Viallard at the house of a mutual friend, the Sub-prefect of Compiègne, M. Decosse, to whom he was saying good-bye. I thus heard the details in private.

When General Pétain was appointed Commander-in-Chief on May 15th, General Debeney, who had recently been appointed Major-General by General Nivelle, sought out his new Chief to speak of his own resignation, for it was customary for a Commander-in-Chief who was an artilleryman to appoint an infantry Major-General, and vice versâ, as was only logical. As a matter of fact, this custom was overlooked sometimes in the war, since Joffre and Pellé were both from the scientific corps, as were Nivelle and Pont; but doubtless the offensive of April 16th, which had displayed an ignorance of the conditions of infantry fighting, had just emphasized the wisdom of the rule.

However this may be, General Debeney offered Pétain his resignation, since they were both infantrymen. General Pétain, with his usual loyalty, did not refuse it, while at the same time expressing his regret that so good a man as Debeney should go. But he thought it unnecessary to hurry the change. He had thought of Anthoine, a gunner, as Major-General, but Anthoine was about to take part with the First Army, on the left of the British, in the battle of Flanders, which he had prepared, and he must be left to his task. On the other hand, Pétain would be pleased to appoint Debeney to the command of this First Army when it should have gained the prestige of its success in Flanders. It was better, therefore, to wait for the accomplishment of this event, and so it was decided. The battle of Flanders, after a brilliant course, achieved its ends. General Debeney renewed his request, and was told that he would be warned in good time, and that there was no hurry, as Anthoine wanted a rest.

One afternoon, on returning to his office after a

ride, he found on his table a letter of appointment which informed him that two days previously he had been appointed to the Command of the First Army. It will easily be seen how inconvenient this was. General Debeney could from that moment no longer exercise the powers of Major-General; had he wished to make any appointment, he could not do so. Further, his signature had not been valid for the last two days. He was deeply offended, and left Compiègne that very evening. Captain Viallard, who was of a sensitive nature, had other grievances. "From the day when one no longer 'belongs to the house,' one finds an icy indifference in all quarters!" he told me. "The very people who yesterday besieged my office with requests and were all smiles have now an air of avoiding me, as though they feared to incur the wrath of my successor. It isn't as though we were in disgrace. Why are they so frightened of me?"

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The battle of Flanders was a trial-ground for General Pétain. In possession of all his talents, he resolved to put an end to the deplorable wastage which our precarious position on the Chemin-des-Dames involved. For the attacks of April 15th and those of May had given us a doubtful advantage. It was all very well to claim that the famous plateau belonged to us from that time. It was an acquisition which had cost us as many losses to retain as it had to conquer. From covered positions on the reverse slopes the enemy could attack with advantage and roll us down from the heights, which had then to be painfully regained.

The battle of Malmaison gained for us at a blow the whole defensive system of the Chemin-des-Dames as far as the Ailette, and henceforth the sector became quiet. The victory of Malmaison, a model of the great victory which we should have achieved on this front if events had not been modified by what followed, will remain a masterpiece of tactics.

Prepared with meticulous care, it only involved eleven miles of front, from the Mont-des-Singes to l'Epine de Chevregny. But the point chosen for the attack, by

threatening the hinge of the Chemin-des-Dames defences, caused the collapse of the whole system. On this narrow front an unprecedented concentration of guns was made. Two days before the attack an officer of the Information Section of that army came to see us. In spite of the progress made, this army remembered so well the terrible and costly assaults of April that its Staff had not complete confidence in the success of the operation. It can be seen how profoundly the morale of the troops had been impaired.

At ten o'clock on the morning of the 23rd news came in. I was told to announce the attack and its success in the *communiqué* without waiting for fuller details. Having learnt caution, I wrote: "We have made progress on the whole front of attack." Colonel Serrigny, better informed as to the progress of the fighting, amended it more optimistically: "We have made satisfactory progress." But General Pétain, usually so calm and cold, was so certain that he took his pen and wrote: "Made great progress."

It turned out that he was right. The enemy's line had been pierced on a front of eleven miles; we held the fort of Malmaison, Allemant, Vaudesson, and Chavignon. The quarries of Montparnesse, the enemy's chief stronghold in this region, broken up by our heavy shells, imprisoned their garrison. Our astonished troops, going forward under the protection of admirable protected barrages, had succeeded in passing the formidable defences of the enemy without great loss. Calm reigned during the night. The enemy, stunned by the blow and deprived of his battery positions, which had been taken by storm, had no power of counter-attack. During the following days we pushed forward as far as the Forest of Pinon and reached the Oise-Aisne Canal. It was not until the 29th that the enemy summoned up strength for an unavailing counter-attack on the Mont-des-Singes, then held by us. Our advance reached a depth of five miles in some places. On November 3rd, abandoning the Chemin-des-Dames under our threat to his flank, the enemy evacuated the strong positions of Hurtebise, Ailles, and the

plateaux of Vauclerc and California, to which they had always held fast, and drew back north of the Aisne on a front of twelve miles. Henceforth the famous twenty-five miles of the Chemin-des-Dames was indisputably ours. This victory yielded us 12,000 prisoners, 200 guns, 222 trench mortars, and 700 machine-guns.

The tanks, in close co-operation with the infantry, were shown to be possessed of definite tactics. Our troops and Staff regained their full confidence and expressed unbounded admiration of the terrible destruction wrought by our heavy shell, which nothing had been able to resist.

Such was the work of Pétain, five months after assuming command.

CHAPTER IV

The Sword and the Pen

I HAVE already mentioned Colonel Serrigny's excess of diplomacy. He fell into this mistake once more, at the time of the reorganization of the Information Section. Since the events of April, it had been resolved, both by the War Office and G.Q.G., that this service should be reconstituted. General Pétain had already recalled Henry Bordeaux and Louis Madelin, with many other officers of indisputable utility. M. Painlevé, the Minister of War, decided to improve and extend the institution. Colonel Marcel Prévost was entrusted by him with this task. The literary men and journalists in the Information Section were overjoyed at this news. Here we had an Academician, one of our greatest writers, to take in hand the vital problem of propaganda ; and as he was a lieutenant-colonel in rank, he would presumably have the necessary authority among professional soldiers.

Colonel Prévost's idea was to attach the Information Section of G.Q.G. to the War Office, on the same footing as the B.M.I. at Paris. Each service was to have its own Chief, under the supreme direction of Colonel Prévost, who was to spend his time between Paris and Compiègne, with the title of Inspector-General of Military Information Services. His idea was to put an end to the antagonism between the bureaux, which I have mentioned in all its bitterness under the Joffre *régime*, and which ended in the extinction of the Information Section under Nivelle. This plan was inspired by the B.M.I. and Colonel Carence, its Chief, with the object of waging war against G.Q.G.

But the officers of the Information Section were

quick to perceive the danger. They were suddenly to belong, not to the Staff, but to the Minister. But a Minister disappears more rapidly than a Commander-in-Chief, and he is liable to political influence. We should, therefore, be constantly exposed to parliamentary interference in our service, and political considerations would be superimposed upon the strictly military principles which guided us. What would happen to us, if any particular Minister quarrelled with the Commander-in-Chief? What attitude should we take up? Would our duty impel us to serve one to the detriment of the other? Finally, from the point of view of principle, what Commander-in-Chief would allow the Minister to obtain a foothold within his own domain, a sort of enclave where he was the direct chief without intermediary, for from the day that this principle should be accepted, the Minister could appoint and remove at his pleasure? It was a first step towards the complete recasting of the Staff. The Minister might just as well claim the Honours Branch, the Intelligence Department, the Postal Control, and so forth. Would G.Q.G., which had hitherto so jealously preserved its independence, give way upon this point? There was only one opinion in the departments—that such a thing was impossible, that it was absurd and would not bear five minutes' examination. Colonel Serrigny, when I warned him some days in advance of the suggestion about to be made to him, declared emphatically that he would not entertain it for a moment. The Information Section should remain responsible to G.Q.G., Colonel Prévost forming the link between it and the B.M.I. This was only common sense.

At this juncture Colonel Marcel Prévost came to Compiègne. The great novelist had the air of a second-lieutenant. He was clothed in an immaculate tunic, glittering with gold, with a fresh rosy face and wonderfully black hair. The astonished spectator noticed his rank and his collar of a Commander of the Legion of Honour, contrasting with the impression of surprising youth. We felt that his prestige would

ennoble our hitherto modest functions. Without loss of time he asked to see the Commander-in-Chief, and was received by Colonel Serrigny. Was he unable to resist Colonel Prévost's persuasive eloquence, or did his gentleness inspire him with complete confidence? I do not know. In any case, half an hour later our new Chief came back to our office to announce that his suggestion had been adopted in its entirety. Henceforth we were officers of the War Office, on detachment in the "Zone of the Armies" at G.Q.G.

The presence of Colonel Prévost consoled us for this unwelcome solution. His friendly and conciliatory attitude had secured him the support of everybody. No colonel was more at home than he in his uniform, which he seemed to wear as the undress of an Academician. While he was talking to us of a thousand things one day, he perceived that time was getting on. He was invited to lunch with General Pétain. He went up to the mirror over the mantelpiece and, taking a toilet-set from his pocket, he parted his hair carefully. He hurried away, bidding us good-bye, carrying in his clothing, in addition to the perfume he always used, the horrible stench of paraffin exhaled by our improvised stoves.

Colonel Carence, the head of the Paris bureaux, came to G.Q.G. to organize the Information Section. One of the organizations to which he devoted all his care was the establishment of a French Press Mission at G.Q.G. A mission of Allied journalists was already established, thanks to Lieutenant Pernot, who had exercised great discernment in gathering together the principal publicists of England and America. Since his time the mission had been enlarged by Major de Cointet. It was the sole organization connected with the Information Section which was still flourishing, under the discreet direction of Captain de Courcel, assisted by a few English-speaking officers. This mission led a most enjoyable life. Established a few miles from G.Q.G., in a château hired for the purpose, and provided with cars and a numerous retinue of cooks, servants, orderlies, and clerks, it had taken on

the appearance of an Anglo-American club. The high salaries paid them by their papers allowed these correspondents to do themselves very well. Regular invitations to lunch or dinner were sent to the G.Q.G. officers whose duty it was to keep them informed as to military events. Our *confrères* often toured the front and followed the offensives of our troops. Their dispatches were censured at G.Q.G. They rendered great services to the French cause and always proved themselves devoted friends of the country.

The French mission was organized in the same way. The château of Offémont, belonging to Count Pillet-Wil, situated in a wild spot at the edge of the plateau of Quennevières, fifteen miles from Compiègne, was chosen to house the representatives of the great French newspapers accredited to G.Q.G. As these men drew less money than the English and Americans, it was necessary to make rigid calculations to avoid augmenting their expenses. The château of Offémont was of the type of the seigniorial castle. Built on a hillock, and surrounded by wild and wooded valleys, it was a romantic, sad, and rather sombre spot. Madame Brinvilliers lived there for some time, and the story went that she gathered in the surrounding country the herbs from which she concocted her poisons. The ruins of an abbey to which her lover is said to have fled can still be seen in the neighbourhood. At night both of them wandered round the edges of the pond meditating their sinister designs, under a malevolent moon and surrounded by croaking frogs. Offémont had been occupied till then by an Artillery Staff. In the park were gun emplacements, underground galleries, and munition dug-outs; on the southern slope of the plateau of Quennevières, which rose in front of the château, deeply dug shelters still held the remains of the straw on which for many months our soldiers had slept. From the summit of the plateau was spread out, as far as one could see, a vast and deserted expanse, the haunt of crows, open to the winds, cut up here and there by shell-holes. Severe fighting had taken place on the edge of this desolate region, but since the

enemy's retirement, our troops had pushed much farther forward, and already returning peasants were effacing the traces of war.

It may have been the effect of the legend attached to the château, but no sooner had they taken up their quarters in this melancholy spot than the war correspondents began to complain of boredom. Sharp quarrels arose among them every hour of the day, of which the brunt fell on the officers who served as their informants. Why were they not taken to see a battle? Frequent delegations came to Compiègne to grumble and protest. As soon as they were taken to the Front, more trouble arose. Each wished to go his own way, but if one of them witnessed something more interesting than the rest, his colleagues declared that he had been unduly favoured at their expense, until it was resolved that all of them should be taken together to the same places. But under these conditions they were all compelled to write the same things, while each of them was imbued with the desire to find some exclusive news with which to secure a "scoop" and cut out his colleagues. They had brought with them their professional prejudices and their vocation of hunters of scandal spiced with sensational details, and imagined the duties of war correspondents to be those which Jules Verne paints in *Michel Strogoff*. Like Alcide Jollivet, they would gladly have ridden thirteen miles to cut out the message of Harry Blount. But a slow and methodical military administration, fearful and jealous of the truth, took charge of their dispatches, cut long passages out of them and sent them all to Paris together, where another bureau cut them about. This was enough to infuriate the most patient.

Among other deplorable proceedings, some correspondents, who had to be removed as a result of their incapacity and general attitude, hit upon the idea of sending the most unfortunate paragraphs to the *Cri de Paris*. They ridiculed the organization to which they belonged, and insinuated that the nobility of France had been mobilized to look after them. The joke of this was that it was true. Colonel Prévost

had appointed for the purpose a certain number of wounded or unfit officers. But, by a curious coincidence, most of these officers bore great names, a fact which was bound to cause a certain sensation in a government so republican as that of M. Painlevé. When the matter was reported to Colonel Prévost, he evinced no concern, and merely remarked with a smile, "How very Parisian!" As a matter of fact, nobody attacked him on the subject, and these officers continued to render the most excellent services in circumstances which called for devotion and tact.

In order to raise his authority to the highest pitch and appease the journalists by flattering their vanity, Colonel Prévost resolved to bring off a great coup. He announced that he would bring the Minister of War, M. Painlevé, to dinner at Offémont. This piece of news was received by every one with incredulity. As though at such a time as this the Minister could afford to spend an evening fifty miles from Paris in attending a Press banquet! These flattering attentions to journalists were all very well before the war.

But the event took place as Colonel Prévost had announced. M. Painlevé and his orderly officer arrived late one afternoon. He took an *apéritif*, walked in the park, chatted with his hosts. The most cordial relations existed. The Minister, familiarly and discreetly, revealed some important facts. At dessert Marcel Prévost made a flattering speech, as befitted a consummate courtier who has the future in view and does not forget beneath his uniform his interests as a writer in the presence of the Press. I admired the respectful familiarity with which he spoke to the Minister, whom he wittily addressed in three different styles as "M. le Ministre," "My dear colleague," "My dear friend." He displayed M. Painlevé struggling with his terrible labour and responsibility, and gave us to understand his own influence with this man who bore the whole weight of the war.

Curiously enough, the Minister's visit was not the success it might have been. The journalists seemed to feel that the honour shown to them was excessive ;

they attacked Marcel Prévost for having wasted the Minister's time, and regarded him as an impudent swaggerer. At this time the mission, with rare exceptions, was badly manned. The great newspapers had put only second-class reporters at the disposal of the Army. On this account the impression of the journalists, conscious of their inferiority, was not incorrect. They truly discerned that the Colonel had placed his own *amour-propre* before the general interest. They would have been more indulgent had they understood that Marcel Prévost had not been able to resist the temptation to play the rôle of politician and soldier before an audience half civil and half military. Having had the honour of calling on Colonel Prévost in his office in the Rue St. Dominique some days previously, I did not make the same mistake. The infantile joy of the Colonel, delighted with his uniform and unable to see a mirror without admiring himself complacently in it, had not escaped me. As soon as I appeared, he begged me to come with him and help to settle an important question. We went up to the first floor, near the Minister's rooms. He told me in confidence that he wanted to establish his office in a little room separated from the Minister's sanctum by a vestibule. To reach his room, M. Painlevé was obliged to cross this little room, and Marcel Prévost, by occupying it, would have received every day the great man's first glances. As may be supposed, this courtly disposition intrigued me. But the difficulty was to take up a good position without becoming a nuisance. I can still see Marcel Prévost, assisted by his aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Dupuis-Mazuel, rehearsing the scene which he had in mind. "Now!" he exclaimed. "I am the Minister. I leave my room, open the door, walk across like this, and naturally come in here. So my table must be here. You had better put yours over there, Dupuis-Mazuel." But nothing came of the scheme. I do not know why. For that matter, it was in vain for Marcel Prévost to strive to catch the first glance from the Minister, as the latter rose at dawn and the Colonel did not appear in his office before ten o'clock.

This visit of M. Painlevé to Offémont, if it did not increase Colonel Marcel Prévost's prestige among the journalists, brought him, on the other hand, considerable kudos with the professional soldiers. I could see once more the attraction which power has for these disciplined men. An officer of the mission, who shall be nameless, finding himself at Nancy when the Minister's visit was announced, did not hesitate to drive 250 miles in his car to attend the dinner, not because it was his duty, but of his own free will. This action surprised us all the more because usually nobody expressed greater contempt for the republican authorities. However, such weakness is only human, and justifies Lamartine's comment that nature is not made up of soldiers and civilians, but of men.

The fall of Painlevé's cabinet was the end of this amazing adventure. With it vanished the boldest dream that a man of letters has ever conceived. At that very time Colonel Prévost, high in favour, aspired to nothing less than to be appointed to the command of a brigade. Perhaps I explain myself ill, he aspired to the stars of a general, not to the actual command of a brigade. The novelist's ambition had its source in his vanity, for the *képi* decorated with oak-leaves and the plumed hat would have suited him wonderfully. It was at a time when, for reasons of prestige, all our military attachés or chiefs of missions abroad had, irrespective of their former rank, been promoted general while they held their appointments. Marcel Prévost hoped to obtain from M. Painlevé a short mission to Portugal, just long enough to display his uniform to the Portuguese ladies and to make a few sensational entries into the Academy and the *salons*. It cost him much to resign this project when M. Clemenceau refused to fall in with it. I saw him greatly dejected during the early days of the new Ministry. He told me one day, when I called on him in the Rue St. Dominique: "Nothing is changed, but we no longer have a Minister." And, at the end of the month, having drawn his pay, he returned no more.

The relations between G.Q.G. and the journalists were not always unclouded. At G.Q.G., with the exception of Colonel Serrigny, who was not frightened of the Press, nobody had anything but a vague idea of what should or should not be said. Their love of secrecy, their fear of responsibility, their jealousy of the departments, and above all their terror of the printed word, perpetually militated against the real desire of the officers to make use of the Press. As soon as operations began, the correspondents expressed their desire to be present. The chiefs of the missions tremblingly transmitted these desires to the Third Bureau. Then ensued a shower of "ifs" and "buts." "Impossible, too early. Wait for a few days. The combatants must not be interfered with." I always admired that reply. One can picture the journalists, notebook in hand, tugging at the sleeves of soldiers engaged in the battle and causing them loss of time, or blocking the roads and getting in the way of the supply services. The correspondents were exasperated at such replies. They declared that they would not stay a minute longer in their barracks. Somehow or other, they were pacified by the efforts of the Information Section, and they wrote their articles. Then the work of the censorship began. The wretched scribblers, not knowing what to describe, imagined more or less plausible details. "But this is absurd," said the Third Bureau. "We can't let that pass." Or they mentioned the names of generals, and these names were struck out, anonymity being the rule. Or, again, they mentioned divisions, our own or the enemy's, by name. "That must come out," said the Second Bureau in turn. "It will give information to the enemy; besides, it is inexpedient to let him know that we are aware of his Order of Battle."

After passing through all the various departments (Railways, if a sentence alluded to railway matters; Transport, if lorries were mentioned; Aviation, if the name of an "ace" occurred; Tanks, if that word appeared), their "copy," scarred with blue, red, and green pencils, decimated and curtailed, became a mere

skeleton. The articles were immediately sent to Paris by a special car at the correspondents' expense, nearly ninety miles there and back. And next day the correspondents, full of smouldering wrath, read in the articles of Marcel Hutin, who had not budged from the capital and was not accredited to G.Q.G., all the information which had been deleted from their copy, and which had been sent him without objection, and even eagerly, by the Army Headquarters.

CHAPTER V

The French in Italy

THE reorganization of G.Q.G., so energetically undertaken, began to bear fruit. It was high time ; a critical period had arrived.

The Russian Revolution was clouded by excesses. Dominated by Maximalists, it began to develop into an orgy under the sinister influence of Lenin. Prikase No. 1 had destroyed discipline among the troops, and the era of the soviets had begun. The July offensive undertaken by Broussiloff ended in disaster. Stanislov, Czernowitz, Riga, Jakobstadt, Livonia, and the Oesel Islands, were in the hands of the Germans. The Russian Army, undisciplined and lacking munitions, was now nothing more than a horde of demoralized men.

Overwhelmed on the Western front by the British and French, the Germans made haste to put an end to matters in the East in order to direct their efforts against us. But first of all they sought an easier prey in Italy. As the Russian menace was at an end, the Austrians and Germans concentrated against our Ally.

The news of the Caporetto disaster burst upon us like a thunder-clap on the very day after the Malmaison victory. Our enemies had long announced this attack upon Italy. Already, in 1916, the Austrians had developed an attack against the Trentino ; but, taken in rear by Broussiloff, the Imperial troops had been compelled to withdraw their best divisions to close the gap opened in Galicia.

In the letters which he wrote to the President of the Council, informing him of the mistakes made

on the eve of April 16th, Colonel Messimy voiced the fears of the whole Army in begging the Government to turn its eye towards Italy, in which direction the first blows of the enemy would fall. As a result of these representations, the Conference of St. Jean de Maurienne took place. A scheme of contact with our Allies was drawn up, and plans worked out for the transport and supply of our troops.

But at that time Italy showed no great enthusiasm for close co-operation with our forces. In full possession of her strength, conscious of her superiority over the Austrian, she preferred to act alone. The successful offensive in May at Monte Cucco and Iamiano, the brilliant victory of Bainsizza in August, and her progress towards the heights of Hermada, confirmed her in her idea of finishing the war alone and keeping all the glory for herself. Once the Hermada fell, the way to Trieste and Pola lay open before her. We looked to her, then, as the hope of the coalition. To our offers to form an important inter-Allied force in order to take Trieste as quickly as possible and march upon Vienna, her Command had replied with impossible conditions. "Give us a million men or nothing," they said. But it was impossible to abandon the Western front in order to strike at Austria. It would certainly have been better to submit to these conditions, supposing them to be realizable. But further, the Italian Command proposed to have the direction of operations. In short, the project could not be undertaken.

Now luck had turned against her. A great weariness, a ferment of discouragement, maintained by an active *défaitist* propaganda, undermined her army. Day after day, defeat and utter disaster overtook her. The Austro-Germans entered Udine, made 200,000 prisoners, and captured thousands of guns. France forgot her victory. All eyes were turned towards our unfortunate Allies, and the dispatch of Franco-British troops was immediately decided upon.

At G.Q.G. the Italian mission was the object of every attention and sympathy. The Italian officers

had by their friendliness and cordial good-fellowship acquired the regard of the French. Their Chief, Colonel Ruspoli, had been attached to the mission since its establishment ; originally merely an attaché, he was now in charge of it. He was connected with France through his family. Beneath their worldly appearance and their air of not treating events too seriously, the Italians had great national feeling and patriotism. One learnt how great a hold love of country has over men's minds in observing the officers of the Allied missions. These officers felt acutely everything that happened to their country. They displayed profound joy at each victory obtained by their arms. If bad news came, their agitation was very noticeable. I have been greatly moved by the tragic expression of the Serbs when their country was overrun. I shall always remember General Račić, with his terrible look of an old wolf at bay.

The Belgians, proud and intensely patriotic beneath their appearance of good-fellowship, had known many sad moments. It is only necessary to have seen the soldiers of suffering nationalities to understand the folly of doctrines which preach the forgetfulness of country and the love of humanity. We must have seemed to them egotistical and hard in spite of all our sympathy. They felt hurt sometimes and ready to hate us for our apparent indifference, in spite of our desire to better their lot, for suffering is fatally unjust. More spontaneous and demonstrative, the Italians were agonized at the Caporetto disaster. In the disorganization of the Italian Army, no more news reached the mission. Every day about two o'clock a young secretary of Colonel Ruspoli came to the Information Section to see the wireless messages sent us by the Eiffel Tower. The unhappy lad could not restrain his tears as he read the dispatches. With his Italian accent, rendered still more evident by his distress, he expressed his dismay. He was a native of the country invaded by the Germans. In tragic tones he exclaimed : " Cividale ! Udine ! Pordenone !

that beautiful country so rich and populous! A paradise . . . !”

At last the agony became less acute, and he became calmer. I had the joy of seeing his face light up as the news grew better. With touching *naïveté*, on the day when I informed him that the Germans had ceased their advance and only claimed 15,000 prisoners, he replied: “No more? Then it’s over, thank God!”

This may give us some idea of what our countrymen abroad, our prisoners, and our brothers in Alsace, had to endure at the beginning of the war and the early months of 1918.

As soon as it had been decided that French troops should go to the help of our Allies, Colonel Prévost appointed two information officers to accompany the Expeditionary Force.

Colonel Serrigny had left G.Q.G. less than a fortnight earlier. His departure had been so sudden as to take us by surprise. As soon as he was promoted Colonel, there had been the question of his assuming a command. But the Minister himself had expressed a desire that he should remain at his post. Colonel Serrigny therefore told us that he had abandoned for the present the idea of leaving us. Then suddenly he made a decision and came to bid us farewell. It is difficult to say what had happened. The secret, if there was one, was well kept. But I have always imagined that this unexpected move was the result of the rivalry between Colonel Serrigny and General de Barescut. Several months later, when I was calling on the former *chef de cabinet*, then promoted General for service in the field and covered with glory for his share in the events of March 21st, I asked him if he would not shortly return to the Commander-in-Chief. There was nothing indiscreet in the question, since the intimate relations between the two had never ceased, and whenever he was passing he had been the guest of the Chief. He replied that, as far as he was concerned, he would have been delighted to work once more under the orders of so eminent a man, but that his rank now forbade him any other post

than that of a head of a department. "Besides, the choice between Barescut and me would have to be made," he added. "Our ideas could never be reconciled."

It was therefore satisfactory to learn that Colonel Serrigny, who commanded the infantry of a division at the Front, was to become Chief of Staff to General Fayolle, who had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the French troops in Italy. The duties of the French Command were bound to be delicate, and the tact, wit, and diplomacy of which Colonel Serrigny had given so many proofs made him the man for this post. At the first news of the Italian disaster, Colonel Serrigny, still Pétain's *chef de cabinet*, had devised a plan for the intervention of our troops in Italy, and also for a single Command, for it was considered that such a lesson should teach the Allies the need to make their union as tight as possible. These two schemes, which he had willingly shown me, had seemed to me in every way remarkable. The first was directly opposed to the state of mind which then held sway in France. The rapid advance of the Austro-Germans in Italy had literally stricken with madness Gustave Hervé and the arm-chair strategists who expounded their views in the Press. Nothing was heard of now but a war of movement. It was obvious, according to these, that the break-through and Napoleonic triumphal marches were possible, since the Germans had accomplished them, not only in Russia, but also in Italy. Therefore, they said, let us try a bolder policy; the war of limited objectives is a makeshift to which we cannot always be bound. In Italy our troops will be able to display their power of manœuvre, and resume the war of movement abandoned on the Western front. Our general will be able to give battle in open country, where French strategy will get the better of German technique, especially as the greater part of their opponents will be Austrians.

At this time the Press was full of stupidities of this kind. The old French fever of boasting once more infected the land; the famous *furia francese*, disguised

by a hundred literary metaphors, all that archaic and variegated vocabulary which previous generations have learnt in the history of battle, returned to the charge, and Joseph Prud'homme brandished his sword as he strode about in his slippers. Like the pensioned war-horse who prances when a child blows a trumpet, the French stiffened at these words. Nivelle was not only a rash commander, he was representative of the national temperament. This is the reason that he was blindly followed, though there were many in the country who saw the pit towards which he was leading us. There are still many to-day who wax enthusiastic when they think of the magnificent success the Aisne offensive might have been. They prefer to attribute the failure of so many hopes to some interference on the part of the politicians rather than admit that the plan was impossible and the hope vain. They base themselves on vague analogies in order to identify his actions with those of Foch. A search through the newspaper files at the time of our intervention in Italy will disclose the same fever, the same frenzy, the same simplification of war, expressed in the vocabulary of Murat or Lassalle. It is impossible to rise superior to this temperament. Pétain was never thoroughly popular with the masses. He was too disciplined, too self-possessed; he did not gamble on his luck; he was a calculator, and people prefer the lucky venturer. Consequently, there was always a sort of revolt against his power and type of genius. It was said that he lacked confidence and imagination.

From the most peaceful shopkeeper to the Staff officers fresh from the Staff College, not to mention Gustave Hervé, all found in that most wonderful word "imagination" the solution of all military problems.

In his scheme, Colonel Serrigny ran directly counter to these ideas. He showed that the Italian front, although still fluid, would rapidly crystallize as much on the enemy's side as our own, would become a defensive line bristling with guns, and that we should thus return to siege warfare. A break-through would thus be necessary to restore a war of manœuvre.

But for this purpose we were lacking in numbers and material. The Italian Army, decimated, enfeebled, needed reorganization before everything. Our rôle must consist in holding part of the front, to allow our Allies time to breathe ; we must place our methods at their disposal, constitute ourselves their instructors. For their defeat was chiefly due to this, that a mass of divisions of assault, not Austrian, but German, admirably trained and taught, had brought to the Italian front the hard and scientific war of the Western front, and the potent methods of Ludendorff.

From such ideas we could forecast the part which Colonel Serrigny was to play. It was not to be feared that under his care the French Army would plunge into adventure. But he was to meet with great difficulties. No sooner had he arrived than he went to the French Mission at Italian G.Q.G. And here again we see a characteristic peculiarity of the French mind. By some curious mental aberration, as soon as a Frenchman finds himself representing France abroad, he feels himself bound to accept blindly the policy of the country to which he is sent. For example, if it be Italy, he is more Italian than the Italians. Is it an excess of loyalty, or a form of courtesy ? Or is it, rather, a good way of making oneself welcome in a foreign country ?

The phenomenon occurred in Italy. The French Mission immediately looked askance upon the schemes of Fayolle's Staff. They feared it would irritate the susceptible Italians if we suggested supplying their troops with instructors, or if we asked to control the operations on their front. The Allies must place themselves under the orders of General Diaz.

A deep antagonism reigned between the two groups of officers, each animated by opposite enthusiasms. And without a doubt the leaders from France were lacking in the prudence necessary to deal with Allies so jealous of their independence and national feeling ; but it is easy to understand that the opposite party exaggerated their discretion in the desire to avoid all friction. At this juncture came letters from the

officers of Fayolle's Staff, exasperated at the attitude of their comrades at the mission. General Foch, then Chief of the General Staff, went to Italy to investigate. He stayed with the mission, and, it is said, inspired by them, he adopted their point of view. He evinced a disposition to accept all the Italian suggestions, and notably the supreme command of Diaz. I have since been told by an officer of the mission to whom I explained my ideas that, as a matter of fact, Foch showed himself very clever. Fayolle's Staff were up in arms. Were their troops to be frittered away in detail, and sent to those points where trouble was expected? It was essential that the French Command should retain hold of its concentrated forces, and to bring them into action where it thought best, in consultation with General Diaz.

Foch was accused of neglecting the Commander of our forces. When he gave a state dinner at the French Mission in honour of the Italian Commander-in-Chief, he did not invite Fayolle. His excuse to the latter, who was an old comrade of his, was: "I did not ask you, you see, because I am living at the expense of the mission, and food is very dear here." Of course, these rumours must not be accepted without reservation, but they show the acuteness of the rivalry which then existed in Italy.

Colonel Serrigny took a decisive step. He unfolded his ideas to all the French correspondents in Italy. Struck with their good sense, the correspondents inserted them in their papers. The *Temps*, among others, published an exact and fully documented article which made a great sensation and was appreciated in Paris. But the French Ambassador in Italy, accustomed to another sort of diplomacy, took up arms on behalf of the mission and decided upon a counter-move. "The Tiger" had just come into power like a cannon-ball. Colonel Serrigny was immediately removed. When he arrived in Paris he demanded an interview with the President of the Council. Received during the first five minutes by M. Clemenceau as if he were a dog interrupting a game of skittles, he

held his ground, explained his ideas, and compelled a hearing. Intelligent views were never neglected by the President of the Council. He calmed down, and told the Colonel that he would have done just the same in his place.

CHAPTER VI

The Cambrai Attack

WHILE the situation was becoming consolidated in Italy, and while in France M. Clemenceau was reassuring men's minds, our British Allies brought off the Cambrai attack in the most masterly manner.

This affair deserves close examination, first because it was a revelation to G.Q.G., and secondly because it is expedient to answer the charges of short-sightedness levelled against the French Command. No operation was kept more secret. The English, when they wish to be discreet, are more successful than anybody in the world, far more so than the French, who never secured even relative secrecy as to their projected offensives. It is no use blaming journalists or Parliament. The Army itself, with the exception of the Third Bureau, who no doubt found satisfaction in being the only ones in the know, was constantly indiscreet throughout the war. At G.Q.G. the Registry was the news agency of events at the Front. No sooner had they returned from their circuits than certain officers wandered through the departments telling their friends all they had learned. Through them we knew everything. With surprising rapidity they acquired the art of gleaning at a glance the contents of the documents they registered, and drawing the most ingenious deductions from them. But it must be stated that the rumours which spread through the corridors did not pass out into the streets.

As for the combatants, they no sooner entered a train than their first business was to tell the first person they met what was happening in their sectors. At the Postal Control I saw a letter from an artillery

lieutenant, addressed to a young lady of doubtful morals at Dijon, which contained a complete description of the battery positions in a certain sector, with amazing details as to their position and the names of the commanding officers, of whom many seemed to be clients of the lady. On this occasion an example was made and the officer severely punished. But how many similar letters must have escaped observation?

But in the case of Cambrai, even on the eve of the attack, nobody knew that it was in preparation. With the exception of the Commander-in-Chief—who told me so himself—nobody at G.Q.G. was informed of the project, which had been in preparation for a long time. Pétain, having been consulted, approved of the plan and promised immediate support. The scheme was to mass a number of tanks on the part of the front held by an indifferent enemy division and to send them to the assault of the German positions without artillery preparation one foggy morning. Atmospheric conditions were favourable in the third week of November. The tanks could be grouped without being seen by the enemy, and the line was hidden in thick fog. On November 20th, at dawn, four hundred tanks advanced upon the enemy on a front of six miles. The surprise was complete. The panic-stricken sentries, suddenly confronted at a few yards distance by these steel monsters spitting bullets, took to their heels and ran. The garrisons, hardly awake, took to their dug-outs and were easily mopped up by the infantry which followed this new-fangled cavalry. There were dozens of absurd details. A battalion commander, among others, was taken in his pyjamas as he leapt out of bed. A show of resistance in the second line was shattered, and a complete break-through effected. By ten o'clock our Allies seemed likely to capture Cambrai by the same means.

As soon as he learnt of the success by telephone, General Pétain put the promised supporting troops in motion. The whole of that afternoon, the following night, and even next day, artillery and infantry going north passed through Compiègne. The charges of

unreadiness are all the more unjust because it was impossible to avoid the delay in sending reinforcements except by moving troops before the attack, which would have been the surest way of warning the enemy. Unfortunately, our Allies, amazed by their very success, lost time. In the evening their weary troops did not sufficiently consolidate their newly won positions. Perhaps also, owing to a very proper caution, the field artillery did not follow the movement sufficiently closely. At this moment a good enemy division which happened to be resting in the neighbourhood of Cambrai, and had been instantly summoned, was hurried in lorries towards Marcoing, which our Allies had reached. The battle raged fiercely all night. On the following day, with the energy of desperation, the Germans engaged fresh troops. Our Allies, at the price of heavy losses, held their ground, and even succeeded in capturing on the left Bourslon and Bourslon wood, with the object of widening their salient. But this salient, being relatively narrow, offered too good a target to the enemy's guns, which shelled fiercely this small area packed with troops, while counter-attacks were made on every side. In short, the affair turned out badly and degenerated into a German offensive. It was only by desperate efforts that our Allies succeeded in avoiding being cut off and in extricating their troops, not without retaining fairly important gains.

In truth, the experiment was made too early. On a front of twenty-five miles, with four times the number of tanks, better prepared plans, a more rapid artillery support, and, in my opinion, an immediate exploitation on the left wing, a great stretch of the enemy's front would have fallen that day.

However this may be, the amazing success demonstrated a thing of which we were not yet convinced, that the tanks were a weapon of surprise and an efficient means of effecting a break-through, and not only mere adjuncts to the infantry.

Unfortunately, such enterprises must yield their full results at the first attempt, since they cannot be

repeated. In this war we were always too impatient to utilize our discoveries. And this charge must be made against the British, above all. For example, on the Somme, at a time when the enemy was completely ignorant that we were in possession of tanks, the British insisted upon their employment when they had insufficient quantities themselves and our own were not ready. The effect produced upon the enemy by the new weapon was overwhelming. But how much better it would have been to postpone the attempt for a few months and to have made it with full knowledge and powerful equipment. The enemy, once warned, took precautions, developed counter-measures to these armoured engines and artillery with which to attack them. The German infantry, accustomed to the new danger, lost much of their fear of it. New methods inevitably encounter new difficulties. It was the same thing with the Cambrai attack. Henceforth the enemy was on his guard and devised obstacles to protect himself against surprise.

The events which were now impending allowed us no time to prepare the long-sought break-through by this method ; but the lesson was not lost on us. Henceforth we demanded more of the tanks than we had hoped up till now to obtain from them.

CHAPTER VII

Man Power

ON December 3rd, the news of the Russian Armistice confirmed all the fears which the Eastern front had for long caused even to the most optimistic. The putting out of action of the Russian Army, which had been anticipated by Pétain since the first day of his assumption of command, was now an accomplished fact, and the inevitable was about to happen. Having rid themselves of the enemies on one front, the Germans would concentrate the whole of their forces on the other. The General's whole policy had been inspired by this hypothesis. Our Army, intact, well provided, and not weakened by rash attacks which while they would no doubt have gained ground would have had no decisive result, was in a condition to resist the final assault, when that should take place. But unfortunately the English could not say as much. Wedded to Nivelle's policy of attack, they had hustled the enemy all the summer and part of the autumn. Without succeeding in freeing the Belgian coast they had left on the soil of Flanders, bravely conquered by them, 400,000 men whom they could not replace from their depots. The English Army passed through a crisis of shortage of man power, and went through the painful experiences we had known on April 16th, short of mutinies. In every respect the wisdom of General Pétain was proved to be profound, his estimates correct, his conception of war in accordance with reality.

We held a trump card in our hand ; the entry into the war of the Americans. Through them, the future

was ours. If they arrived soon enough and the enemy offensive were delayed, if we could successfully combine their contingents and ours, the issue of the struggle was not in doubt. In December, 1917, the General clearly explained his ideas. He never deviated from his line of conduct, for he foresaw the future. "My task," he said readily, "is to endeavour to solve the problems of three months hence; I try to keep my mind fixed at that distance ahead. As for the present, since it is already provided for, it is the care of the Staff."

But nevertheless, in spite of the imperturbable calm of the Chief, there was considerable misgiving at G.Q.G. The situation which few had perceived in the distance alarmed those who now saw it face to face. At all events, those critics who had accused Pétain in whispers of lacking initiative and not daring to undertake great offensives were now silenced. Such men existed at G.Q.G. until the end, to such an extent is the offensive spirit instilled into the minds of the French Staff officers. Were they now convinced that the only sound policy was to economize force? I do not think so. Such men are incapable of understanding a policy of economy. Gamblers at heart, they are as reckless of human life as the gambler is of money. For of the military art one may frequently say, parodying the celebrated comment of the younger Dumas on business, that is "the life of others."

They had lived until now upon the idea that we had an enormous superiority in man power, and it seemed that this superiority must always be maintained. Suddenly there was no longer any doubt that we were inferior. In May, in all their appeals for permission to continue the war of attrition, both Nivelle and Haig had relied upon superiority. Six months of giving battle on the part of the English and of prudent attacks on our part had sufficed to reduce this superiority to nothing. This shows the folly of those who relied upon a war of attrition to ensure the defeat of the enemy. In 1915, even in

1916, the reservoir was well supplied; but in 1917 it was empty and the Franco-British forces short of men.

These calculations of superiority of man power had always been based on ration strength and not fighting strength. The English, owing to the extent of their rearward services, counted at least three men drawing rations to one combatant. This accounted in part for the mistakes we had made.

The Germans, adding their forces on the Eastern front to those on the Western, reached a figure of 256 divisions. We and the English together could scarcely count upon 200. There was thus a balance of fifty divisions in the enemy's favour. As to their material on the two fronts, it would be formidable, since what they had on our front alone was approximately equal to ours.

Opinion was divided as to whether or not the enemy would attack. Many temporary officers thought that the enemy had too good a chance of obtaining an honourable peace now that Russia was at his mercy. Given his actual superiority, they did not imagine that he would seek peace from weakness. The sacrifices he would make in the West he would more than atone for by gains in the East. Would the people, once offered a bargain, refuse an offer which would secure to the Allies a part of their demands, with the alternative of fighting to the death with a Germany more powerful than ever? On the other hand, if the enemy were wise, would he not prefer this friendly solution to the uncertain issue, the increase of his misery at home, and a struggle which must inevitably be bloody and which would cost him hundreds of thousands of men? As the offensive held off from day to day, it seemed that this reasoning was justified. And indeed, had Germany possessed a Government worthy of the name, it would not have allowed this chance of securing a favourable peace to slip.

But the professional soldiers at G.Q.G., and especially those in the Third Bureau, faithful to their

theories, did not think so. They declared the enemy would infallibly attack. The policy of Germany was in military hands, and no soldier who had within his grasp a power of this kind would fail to employ it. He would always seek a military decision, as the only one he could imagine or that was worthy of him.

Our friends did not succeed in convincing us, since on the other hand they adduced powerful arguments to prove that if the Germans hurled themselves upon us they would not obtain very important results. We could only reply: Then why attempt it? To which their answer was: Because a true soldier always hopes for victory.

Not that we still believed in the theory of impenetrability of the fronts. The Cambrai attack had dazzled our eyes with great hopes, but by a curious presumption every one was convinced in his own mind that at all events our own fronts were inviolable. So much so that, armed with these powerful arguments, I wrote an unsigned article for *l'Illustration* in which I exposed the reasons for confidence on the eve of the German offensive. I repeat these arguments, for they voice the beliefs held at this time by almost all the officers at G.Q.G., the Army Staffs, and the Government.

It is not possible to compare the Russian and French fronts. On our front immense works have been constructed, and we possess adequate artillery and brave and well-trained troops. On the Eastern front there was lack of organization, disorder and anarchy. Again, in order to make their attack effective, our enemies would have to possess the power of attacking on a front of from a hundred to a hundred and twenty-five miles. Remembering the amount of material requisite for such an attack, could they do so? The figures, which I quoted, of the formidable density of artillery in our big attacks supported the argument. But, the Germans having no tanks, how would they manage to concentrate on the sector of attack the enormous amount of guns and munitions necessary without our becoming aware of it?

In Russia and even in Italy the demoralization of the troops had impaired their observation, but our excellent intelligence service and airmen would warn us. Certainly every determined offensive must mean a gain of ground for the assailant. The Germans might advance six miles, or ten at the most, but no more. After this they would have to begin again. It would mean a fatal wastage for them, while we could make use of American resources. Hence, if the Germans are wise, they will not attack, and if they do so they will show blind fatalism.

If these conclusions were valid, the forecast none the less proved singularly false. Another event demonstrated how firmly the ideas I have mentioned were fixed in the minds of everybody in France.

General Pétain, at the first threat of a general offensive, had prepared a plan of resistance based upon the most recent lessons of the war. A believer in the elastic defensive he did not attach exaggerated importance to ground, for since the retirement of the enemy and the capture of the Chemin-des-Dames we had enough ground in our rear not to be paralysed by fear for the capital. But the Government emphatically refused to adopt this plan. "We will resist where we stand!" Such were the instructions issued to the Command. They feared, no doubt, that marked retirements would produce a bad effect in the country. Besides, the President of the Council was temperamentally incapable of allowing himself to bend. He was sure that the enemy would destroy himself upon the barrier of steel and fire which would meet him, and so he was all the more disinclined to yield ground. I do not know whether the Army Staff inspired him on this occasion. But it would be interesting to know it, for we should have certain proof that the technical advisers of the Government were very badly informed on the state of tactics at this period of the war.

In saying this, I am not relying upon a vague impression, but on the successive instructions which we received at the Information Section. At first

we received orders to write about the "elastic defensive" in order to prepare the public for inevitable retirements. But suddenly came a change, and we heard no more about inevitable retirements.

Now, at the very time when I was so calmly explaining our conviction that the Germans could not surprise us, a supplement to the Intelligence bulletins of the Second Bureau was in existence, entitled "The Attack on Riga." Every one at G.Q.G. had read it, especially the Third Bureau. But whatever may be said to the contrary, I cannot help feeling that they had only just glanced at it. The new measures taken by the Germans on this occasion had been closely followed, but the opinion of our Staff officers had been vitiated by a reservation which had its origin in patriotic pride. "These methods may have succeeded with the Russians, but they never could with us."

It is one thing to be aware of a fact, and quite another to estimate its worth, to throw light upon it, to detach it from its inconsequential context, to see it in its true bearing and to determine its true nature. Our Staff had failed in these respects as regards the Riga incident. I found in an appreciation of the offensive of March 21st, ably written by one of the most distinguished officers of the Third Bureau, the following passage: "The very form of the attack was not unforeseen by our Staff. We had studied the counter-offensive in Galicia carried out by the Eighteenth Army on July 19th, 1915. We had also studied the Riga offensive and we knew that the Germans sacrificed everything to surprise. The battle of March 21st was the exact reproduction of the Riga offensive."

Is not this a timid statement confirming my own views? For should we in turn have been surprised had we got to the bottom of the new methods? In truth, it was believed to be impossible for the Germans to undertake widespread preparations without our becoming aware of the fact—for the preparations must needs be on a vast scale to be successful—on

a front always under observation by aircraft and photographed thousands of times every day. In Galicia and Russia the fronts of attack were very narrow, four to six miles. In truth, it was necessary to be a German to understand the results which the enemy's discipline could secure.

The most astonishing thing in reading the remarks of the Second Bureau on the counter-offensive in Galicia and the Riga offensive, of February 25th, 1918, and December, 1917, respectively, is to observe that besides the secret organization of the front of attack, of disguised approach of assault troops, we had also to take precautions against new methods, such as preliminary bombardments with gas shell intended to silence our battery positions, and that we did not succeed in guarding against these bombardments. This method, which was the exact reverse of the one in use up till then, was based upon a principle which was as important in the art of war as the principle of Copernicus in astronomy, viz. not to attempt to destroy fortified positions and material, but to put them out of action by methods directed against their personnel. Whatever people may say, we had not grasped this vital principle.

It can easily be understood that the German Staff, being in possession of so valuable a principle, of which it knew all that there was to be known, declined under any circumstances to listen to the advice of the prudent, who had many followers in Germany, and who recommended the seizing of the opportunity for making an honourable peace. Ludendorff believed success was certain. Twice (or thrice if Caporetto be included) he had employed von Hutier, the executant of his military schemes, and each time his success had exceeded all his hopes.

December passed in feverish waiting for an offensive believed to be imminent, although the enemy had not entirely wound up his affairs on the Eastern front. We set to work to strengthen our front, and it may be believed that under General Pétain the work was perfectly carried out. Already we

were notified of the arrival in Belgium of a number of divisions which were immediately put into training, and the German papers made much of their preparation for an attack on the Western front. With the material gradually freed the enemy Staff strengthened the equipment of their front everywhere at once, in such a way that we were unable to forecast the spot that he would choose for his decisive effort. Our Intelligence bulletins showed this exactly.

In January the strain in the country and at G.Q.G. was lightened. The offensive had been delayed longer than we expected. The guilty Maximalists, bought by Germany, were giving great trouble to their accomplices. We began to hope that the contamination of anarchy might spread among the German troops, although to avoid any such thing the German Staff continued to dispatch a large number of divisions to Belgium and Northern France. Those who persisted in believing that Germany would prefer a peaceful solution used this idea to reply to those who saw preparations for an offensive in this transfer of troops to the Western front. "Where could they leave them? In Russia, to catch the contagion of anarchy? In Germany? It is not a good thing to exhibit to the troops the wretchedness of the people. There remains only the rear of the enemy front where the air is healthy for fighting men."

Another theory was maintained at G.Q.G. The Germans' hands were much less free than was imagined. Russia was a constant danger to them. They would be compelled to keep an army of observation on the Eastern front of considerable strength, for surprise must always be guarded against and there was a probability of renewed activity in the direction of Roumania. Thus there arose in the Army, in a section of the Press, and soon in the country as well, a fresh epidemic of the offensive germ. Generals and Staff officers began to whisper, "What are we doing? Why do we wait for the enemy? Did not Napoleon lay down that the enemy should not be

permitted to make his preparations without an attempt being made to upset them by determined attack before they were complete?" With surprising rapidity, which showed the force of these ideas upon the minds of our soldiers and upon the French temperament, the theory of a preventive offensive spread everywhere. In certain of the bigger papers articles inspired by leading men appeared, advocating a renewal of activity on our part. The number of officers, even at the Front, infected with this doctrine grew from day to day. At G.Q.G. it had many followers; their discontented faces betrayed them. These murmurs were directed against the Commander-in-Chief and his caution, of which some were weary.

The Peace of Brest-Litovsk, signed on February 9th, provoked still further excitement. Those who had been most alarmed, when the projected offensive of the enemy was spoken of, were now the most carried away. *The preventive offensive*, a magic and mysterious phrase, had always appealed to a vain and fool-hardy public and to Staff officers who had been educated at the Staff College in an artificial Napoleonic tradition shorn of its meaning and more abstract than the great genius who had imagined it. Violent disputes took place. "Cannot you see," said the upholders of Pétain—and in our service we boasted of many such—"that the Germans hope for one thing alone, that we should lose patience and attack? They are unceasingly strengthening their defensive front. The Third Army has just reported the existence of barbed-wire defences which are absolutely invisible, and were only revealed to us by the snow. This constant strengthening is in the hope that we shall go forward. We should fling ourselves against formidable defences with a complete inferiority of troops. Having as assailants of fortified positions sustained heavy losses, we should be at the mercy of powerful counter-offensives on the part of the enemy. Let us not be foolish but wait." But the believers in attack would have nothing of it.

Just at this time I received a letter from a General

commanding at the Front, one of the most brilliant in the whole Army, whose clearness of mind and knowledge of the art of war were exceptional. He begged me to go and stay with him for a few days as soon as I could at his hotel in Paris. I obtained leave for the purpose and found him beside himself. "Pétain will be the ruin of France," he said to me. "His continual temporization will hurl us into the abyss. We have the chance of nipping the enemy's offensive in the bud. If a vigorous Press campaign is not undertaken to open the eyes of the Government and the country to the necessity of a vast preventive attack, we are lost. This campaign must be undertaken; that is why I asked you to come here. The interest of France is at stake, do not delay. I will give you two articles myself."

I was astounded that this well-balanced brain, usually so correct, had fallen a victim to the disease. I made vague promises, pleaded my absence from Paris, promised to do what I could. I made no attempt to argue with him feeling that it would be useless. Besides, what authority had I, a lieutenant of the reserve, to oppose a man in his position?

It can be imagined that severe pressure of this kind was put upon M. Clemenceau. Our Premier deserves the profound gratitude of all Frenchmen for his resistance. His confidence in Pétain remained unshaken and he did nothing to influence him.

Meanwhile the Commander-in-Chief was not without anxiety. This agitation for an offensive was increasing, and he felt keenly that unpopularity was sapping his credit. He was popularly regarded as a man who stood on the defensive at all costs. Ill-judged newspaper articles had spread the idea that Pétain was still the defender of Verdun, that his methods were opposed to those of true conquerors, without perceiving that a leader worthy of the name has no rigid offensive or defensive policy, but employs the means suitable to his purpose. But it was impossible to explain such things to the public. As for those who cannot see safety except in the offensive,

by virtue of the axiom that one should impose one's will upon the enemy, it was quite useless to attempt to convince them.

Colonel Duchêne, who had taken Serrigny's place as *chef de cabinet*, frequently told us with indignation of the absurd stories that were in circulation. Colonel Duchêne had not the brilliant mind of his predecessor, but his correct appreciation of things, his moderation and his absolute loyalty made his advice worth having.

The longer the offensive was delayed, the louder grew the clamour of the partisans of preventive action. Meanwhile the rate of transport of enemy troops from one front to the other grew more rapid every day. Masses of troops were reported on the important lateral line from Hirson to Mézières, and it was easy to see that from the shape of the front the Germans, at the centre of the curve, could in an equal space of time throw them upon any point of the circumference. One wonders what would have happened if the Germans had not decided to open their offensive in March. Could the impatience of the public have been restrained any longer? Would the Government not have been seized by the same ideas? I am fully persuaded that General Pétain, sure of the wisdom of his strategy, would have refused to be driven into an attack. He would have preferred to resign rather than risk his army in such an adventure.

During all this time G.Q.G. had worked hard. A far-sighted disposition of reserves was made to enable us to bring them into action in any of the sectors where the enemy could attack. While the front was comparatively quiet, munitions were accumulated in considerable quantities.

* * * *

A curious thing happened about a month before the offensive. Suddenly one evening towards the end of February, at about half-past six, an enemy plane, which the anti-aircraft watchers on the roof of the Palace had no time to warn us of, dropped a very big bomb and disappeared. The bomb fell a

hundred yards from the Palace in a small street where unfortunately several G.Q.G. messes were situated; The explosion was so violent that five houses were involved and fell like houses of cards. Two officers who were passing were killed outright and several more wounded in the mess rooms. Five minutes later all the first service of the Second Bureau, which was about to go to dinner, would have been struck. Was this an attack upon G.Q.G.? The watcher's story was curious. He said that on suddenly seeing an aeroplane overhead he immediately fired the recognition signal which would have been answered by a French machine. But the aeroplane promptly turned in a half-circle, dropped the bomb and departed. Was it looking for a target which it could not see and was this target the Palace? But it was hard to believe that it could not see these great buildings without assistance. In any event, attracted by the unexpected signal, it had released the bomb where it was. Did the enemy mean to intimidate G.Q.G. and force it to shift its position by demonstrating that it was too close to the line? Many held that this possibly accidental warning should not be neglected. It was pointed out that G.Q.G. could not be worse situated; on the route to Paris, on a river, at a road junction, close to a line of railway which supplied the Northern front, all of them targets which would be bombed unceasingly when operations took place. Why not take precautions now? If we were to be compelled to move in the height of battle it would be very inconvenient, to say nothing of the suspension of work.

It is said that General Anthoine, the newly arrived Major-General, displayed great opposition. He declared that bombardments were good for Staffs, that they shook up the departments, and other witticisms. I do not know if there was any truth in this story, but it is in accordance with his temperament and sarcastic mind. Two reasons existed for not moving at the moment. The first was *amour-propre* and dignity. This bomb, which had cost the lives of

two brave officers, had tremendously amused the Paris of the lobbies, the newspapers and the entourage of the Ministers, that war-time Paris which had lost none of its habits. It was a huge joke that G.Q.G. should be bombed, a joke that would gain fresh zest if G.Q.G. bolted at the first alarm.

The second and more serious reason was worthy of consideration, and I think it was the one that influenced General Pétain. Compiègne was close to the British front; in case of attack upon our Allies measures would have to be taken in consultation with them. The unity of the front not having been realized, precise arrangements had not been made for automatically controlling collaboration. In spite of the excellent and friendly terms between us and the English, a wall divided the two battlefields.

Not that we were then in a position to foretell the point of attack. The Second Bureau declared that the whole German Front was ready. Preparations were universal; narrow-gauge railways, munition dumps, even hospitals had been set up everywhere. But the construction of a large number of aerodromes in Champagne and before the British front led us to suppose that these two sectors were particularly threatened. In Alsace, too, there were important indications. In fact, there was general uncertainty.

General Pétain had taken energetic measures to deal with any eventuality. The fronts, strengthened by defensive works, were now held by the smallest possible number of units for safety. On the other hand, the strongest possible reserves had been accumulated at strategic points. Railways, lorries, all means of transport were mobilized as in the earliest days of the war. A single order was necessary to move the reserves to the sector of the front which should be attacked.

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It will be remembered that the Germans opened the 1918 offensive by bombarding Paris with a long-range gun. On the first day it was thought that an invisible aeroplane had dropped bombs on the capital,

but a fragment of a shell bearing grooves was found, and it appeared that it had been fired from a gun.

The news reached us at G.Q.G. on March 23rd, and was much discussed. The gunners were naturally consulted, but not one of them treated it seriously. Our mess, in which were a few senior artillery Staff officers, became the scene of violent controversy. Bets were made by the gunners, who wagered any number of bottles of champagne, that it could not be proved that a gun was shelling Paris. They would have staked ten years' pay, their fortunes, their very careers on the fact that in the present state of the science of gunnery it was impossible to build such a weapon. It was the same story elsewhere. It is sad to think that in this arm which did so well otherwise there were so many who lacked imagination and were incapable of taking a wide view.

CHAPTER VIII

The Attack of March 21st

ON the evening of March 20th, about ten o'clock, a loud rumbling was heard which continued well on into the night. The rumbling was resumed at five in the morning. On arriving at the office about eight o'clock we learnt that our Allies, having discovered for certain that the attack was about to be made, had delivered an offensive counter-bombardment. The enemy's bombardment had begun at 4.40 a.m. and was still continuing. A little later we were informed by British G.Q.G. that the German infantry had left their trenches at 9.40 a.m. The 1918 campaign had begun.

The day passed without news. An enemy advance was certainly expected ; but we were convinced that the English would stand fast. On the evening of the 22nd, General Pétain learnt that the enemy had made a great incursion through the lines, and had driven in Gough's Army which, overwhelmed by enormous masses, was retiring in disorder. There was no reserve behind the British right. At eleven o'clock in the evening, after consultation with Sir Douglas Haig, Pétain ordered General Pellé's detachment of three divisions and a battalion of *chasseurs à pied*, which by a lucky thought on the part of the Command was quartered just south of the sector attacked, to move rapidly in the direction Noyon-St. Quentin. That night a flight of German aeroplanes was signalled over Compiègne. Alarms had been fairly frequent since January. The enemy planes bound for Paris regularly followed the line of the Oise. Numerous batteries of anti-aircraft guns scattered through the forest fired

on them as they came and went, making an infernal din. Many officers in these circumstances remained at G.Q.G. to get the earliest news from Paris. Until then not a single bomb, with the exception of the one I have mentioned, had been aimed at G.Q.G. But on this particular night an attack was made upon the town, and seven bombs fell within a small area causing but slight damage.

The 22nd was a bad day for our Allies. In the evening we heard of the fall of Tergnier. Columns of artillery passed through Compiègne without intermission, and, crossing the bridge over the Oise, went northwards. At 8.45 p.m. there was a fresh alarm. This time a strong enemy squadron had chosen Compiègne as its target. For an hour bombs and aerial torpedoes fell upon the place, making a terrible noise, which was increased by the anti-aircraft bombardment. The Carrel hospital was hit by five torpedoes which destroyed the ground floor, and killed two of the staff. None of the patients who had been removed to the cellars for safety were hurt. A few officers who were coming out of the Information Section mess at the edge of the forest were surprised on the way. They reached the hospital just in time, a few minutes before the bombs burst.

The planes came back at one o'clock in the morning. A bomb fell on the petrol dump on the banks of the Oise opposite the barracks, and set fire to it. The cars in the garage being in danger from the flames, their drivers, who had been standing by during the alarm, drove them into the forest. Meanwhile the sick in the hospital were being evacuated in the middle of the night. Most of the planes had arrived at the cross-roads, the Oise bridges, the railway, and the station, which was riddled. Several were killed and wounded in the town, although not a single bomb had touched the Palace. But for all that this was a warning. As a matter of fact, the basement of the Palace could have sheltered a whole garrison.

Constructed on the site of some old quarries, the buildings were honeycombed fifty feet below the level

of the ground with long galleries, having here and there deep recesses. Certain curious inscriptions on the walls showed that these had formerly been show places for visitors. They had been cleared of the earth and rubbish that blocked them, and put into order since the day when the bomb fell in front of the Palace. A notice displayed in all the offices laid down that when the alarm siren was heard the clerks and officers were to seek shelter there, following prescribed routes. One or two tables and a few telephones had been provided, so that work could be continued to some extent. But ever since that evening a mass of soldiers and even civilians had invaded the galleries. It was easy to see that work would be impossible. Besides, we could not run the risk of losing in case of fire irreplaceable archives, the plans for the reorganization of divisions, the transport schemes of the Railway Department and so on. The enemy having decided to win the war at any price, might well carry out a concentrated raid upon G.Q.G. This could easily have resulted in its complete destruction and in paralysing the Command in the very crisis of the battle. It is odd that the Germans, determined upon victory or ruin, did not employ this means which was open to them and would have given them an additional chance to those they already possessed in this offensive. But from a singular respect for the rules of the game of war, natural to the strongly hierarchical ideas of a country whose national industry is still war, G.Q.G. was always spared. Obviously the Palace was respected, while bombs rained upon everything in its vicinity.

The next day several villas on the fringes of the forest were requisitioned, and the most important departments and the Commander-in-Chief were installed in them. About midday the archives were removed to them, and work could be carried on without interruption. False alarms continued. Reconnoitring aeroplanes came over to observe the transport of troops. A perpetual traffic went on in the cellars. It was clear that the sections directly concerned in

the battle must realize the necessity of seeking other quarters.

On the evening of the 23rd, I took the *communiqué* to the new quarters of the Commander-in-Chief at nine o'clock. The General had just sat down to dinner, and M. Clemenceau, on a flying visit from Paris, was with him. Although since midday our troops had been engaged with the enemy, it had been agreed that the *communiqué* should contain no mention of our intervention, which was still insignificant while the main interest was elsewhere. M. Clemenceau, calm and full of energy and confidence as usual, listened to the General's explanations and plans. I learnt these details from an officer who dined with them.

The moment was one of unparalleled gravity. The last news had just been brought to General Pétain. In spite of the prodigies of valour of his troops, of their almost instantaneous intervention in the battle, the disorder of the British had opened a great gap on our left into which the enemy was sure to plunge. Pétain decided immediately that the First Army, drawn from the Oise front should concentrate in the Montdidier region to cover the line Beauvais-Clermont. But this intervention would take time. It was essential to stop the enemy or at least to delay them, and there were no divisions available for the purpose and disengaged. The General ate thoughtfully. Suddenly he remarked to the Director of Aviation, General Duval, who was present: "Take the telephone!" General Duval, astonished, laid down his fork and rose. But then his face brightened, he had grasped the Commander-in-Chief's idea with enthusiasm. All the available air forces were to be thrown into the battle on the left of our troops, in the manner of protecting cavalry on a flank. The German divisions encamped in this region and waiting for dawn to begin their advance southwards would be attacked by our aeroplanes. Hundreds of bombs would rain on them that night and strive to demoralize them, kill as many as possible, and scatter them. This was General Pétain's idea which was carried out with the great

success it deserved. Certainly, when Clemenceau reached Paris in his car an hour later he must have been convinced that the fate of France was in good hands. The man in whom he had placed his confidence was worthy of it.

That evening Compiègne was again bombarded with the same violence. Caught on my way back from the General's quarters to the Palace by the explosion of the first bomb, I had to wait for an hour under the trees in the Avenue Thiers until a break allowed me to finish my journey. Long into the night we remained in the catacombs of the Palace. Soldiers were lying here and there on their blankets fast asleep. So deeply were these caverns dug that we could not hear the noise of the explosions. In a corner an officer was in telephonic communication with a watcher on the roof of the Palace, who certainly had a front seat. We learned from him the effects of the bombardment : two houses were on fire in the old town, and the station was half-destroyed. It seemed inconceivable that no order should yet have been given to the officers to prepare to leave Compiègne. The situation could obviously not continue. We were right in the line of the troops advancing to the battle. Many of the inhabitants had left the town during the day. We knew that Colonel Valentin, the head of the *Commandement*, had chosen Chantilly as our new quarters. He had been there since the day before, busy with the installation of the offices. But that evening he was ordered to proceed to Provins. The enemy had advanced too far for Headquarters to be stationed at Chantilly.

Sunday the 24th passed in the same way and the night was the same as its predecessors. The alarm was in operation when, at about half-past ten, an orderly came to distribute through the basement an order from the Major-General stating that the departure was fixed for eight o'clock next morning. All baggage was to be at the entrance of the Palace by six. How were the officers' servants who were quartered in the town among the inhabitants to be warned? Could

this order not have been issued at least by six in the evening? The chorus of imprecations which greeted the order may be imagined. "That is just like Anthoine!" they said; "when will he stop playing the autocrat and disregarding everybody's convenience?" For since he had replaced General Debeney, Anthoine's popularity had not increased. His scornful manner, the rages he flew into without listening to the officers whom he abused, his emphatic rejection of suggestions often without justification, his repressive measures against too frequent telephone communications or for other trifling reasons, had produced a feeling of irritation among nearly all the departments. In the present case he showed himself absurdly disobliging. We had to spend the whole night packing papers and office sundries, and Heaven knows there were plenty of them.

But the order was carried out in spite of everything, and all was ready in time. But at ten o'clock a crowd of officers were still waiting in the Palace yard for the chance of leaving. Mountains of baggage and boxes were piled in every corner. In the square a hundred lorries packed tightly together were loading up in haste. In the neighbouring streets and in front of the church hundreds of others waited their turn. What a target for an aerial bombardment! This summed up the situation and condemned the confusion which the slightest precaution would have avoided.

The thought must have irritated General Poindron, the head of the First Bureau, who was in charge of the move. He kept appearing in a great rage, and rushed at the officers who stood in the courtyard like a band of emigrants, shouting, "What are you doing there, gentlemen? Who said we were leaving? Go back to your offices, get the typewriters unpacked and get on with your work." This formed the comic relief to the gloomy situation and made everybody laugh. One typewriter per office was taken out of its box, but hardly had this been done, than they had to be put back again. The train was ready and would leave

at noon precisely. Fortified with a cold lunch, the officers and most of the clerks went to the station.

My own duties kept me out of this. I was to remain at Compiègne with the Command post, consisting of the Commander-in-Chief, his *chef de cabinet*, the Major-General, the heads of departments with a few assistants, about twenty officers in all, and to leave in the Commander-in-Chief's train when the order was given.

About eleven o'clock I went to the villa of the Third Bureau, a sort of stone cube in imitation of the Trianon outside the town towards Royallieu. I liked to see the Third Bureau at such times. A refreshing strength emanated from it. The well-oiled machine worked at full pressure. This time *amour-propre* was added to national sentiment to spur its energies. The situation of our Allies had to be re-established. With their habitual frankness, for on the field of battle the perfidy of Albion is simply a myth, the latter, surprised by the violence and seriousness of the disaster, had turned to us for help and succour. No ill-placed vanity interfered with the situation between the Headquarters. The imposing figure of Pétain dominated the storm and men turned to him as to an experienced mariner.

The Third Bureau had recently come under the charge of Colonel Dufieux, Micheler's former Chief of Staff. Small, with a regular face and bright eye, he had, like General Castelnau, the classical look of the French soldier as portrayed in the pictures of Epinal. He had been a soldier since childhood, having been brought up at the Prytanée de la Flèche, and one felt that he had the military soul, well tempered, loyal, and almost child-like. His frank and wide-open eyes looked at one almost with surprise. One imagined that he was hopelessly bewildered by certain aspects of life, by the turn, at once absurd and ironical, often taken by events in a world where things do not happen in accordance with manuals of civic virtue and the *Lives of Illustrious Men*. But it was easy to see that he was not deluded by sophistry, nor led away

by the false and perverse elegance of minds which submit willingly to regulations and demand the admiration of others for their action : rather he was capable of expressing lively hatred for them, like that with which the orthodox regard heretics.

Among those who cannot understand the motives of such a simple nature he passed as narrow-minded. I had heard some grumbling when Pétain appointed him to the charge of the Third Bureau. I was to see him at work at a critical time, for General Barescut having left at noon with the greater part of the Third Bureau, he remained alone with two or three assistants by the side of the Commander-in-Chief.

His manner immediately impressed me. He breathed energy and decision and kept his head. Like coachmen who encourage their horses on a hill with friendly clickings of the tongue, he had something about him which was very encouraging. It was a remarkable thing that he never tried, like his colleagues and subordinates, to hide the gravity of the situation from a stranger like myself. Never at such moments, and there were to be many of them, did he say like the others in a distant sort of way, "Everything's going on all right." But smilingly and with a cheerful look he said bravely, "Things aren't very bright to-day, let's be guarded."

He was of the opinion that we should announce the entry of our soldiers into the struggle, especially as it was developing largely against them. I drew up a *communiqué* in accordance with his ideas. Henceforth, the whole of France was to take a heartfelt interest in the struggle, for, although our Allies were fighting on our soil, against our invader, an odd feeling had made us regard their retreat with a less perturbed heart. So true it is that one's country is not only the land, but its sons who die for it.

When I returned to the Palace, it was empty. Here and there orderlies and clerks were strapping up the last boxes. Its great halls had an air of melancholy, again resounding to our footfalls. Would the hated enemy, who had once already set his foot in

this historical spot, invade it once more? In what state would he leave it when he was driven out? The marble Napoleon in the banqueting hall, in the costume of a Roman Emperor, looked like a Chief abandoned by his soldiers.

In the office of the Information Section I found Lieutenant Madelin, who had returned in haste from a mission to pack up. He described to me the desolate aspect of the country. Everywhere on the roads groups of British soldiers with emaciated faces and ragged clothes, some wounded, others worn out, made their way towards the southern ambulances which had been allotted to them; and in the other direction French troops advanced towards the enemy. Here and there a group of the former, seated on heaps of stones, ate and drank with the stupefied expression of soldiers whose heads are still full of the terrible din of the battle, the whistling of bullets and the bursting of shell. Women, children, and old men carrying their household goods, fled with set faces. We had returned to the sorrowful days of invasion. In the town the few inhabitants who remained looked askance at us, and with an ironical smile watched the vast convoy of G.Q.G., which slowly departed. The sudden departure of Headquarters, although it was natural enough, looked very like a flight and had increased the alarm of the population. We carried with us the anathemas of people who made us responsible.

Lieutenant de Chabannes, the liaison officer with the Anglo-American Press Mission, provisionally established at Senlis, joined us. I gave him the latest news, which he immediately sent off to the mission by motor-cyclist. He suggested that we should set ourselves up in the château of Royallieu, the old residence of the correspondents, where the remains of an organization still existed. In the meanwhile we had learnt that the G.Q.G. train, after waiting three hours at the station, had at last left for Provins.

In the evening I found the Third Bureau still in the same state of feverish activity. No G.Q.G. ever

found itself in this situation as the Headquarters of an army corps. It directed the battle hour by hour, in constant communication with General Humbert, who had the honour of co-ordinating the scanty forces scattered on a wide front, retreating step by step, making use of the configuration of the ground and in danger of being cut off by the enemy. Every moment gaps developed in our line which drew farther and farther westward. These holes were plugged with divisions which came up one by one and had hastened up without their artillery, drawing their machine-guns by hand in farm carts. However, in some places batteries took up positions, fired a few rounds, limbered up and moved off to a fresh position. The pressure on Noyon became very violent, as it was the road to Paris. A head of a department at G.Q.G. passed by me in a state of extreme depression, shaking his head dismally. Things must be very grave for the professional spring to run down as far as this. But Colonel Dufieux maintained the same energy, although a slight shade spread over his face. In the *communiqué* the situation was clearly set out, while the vigour of the defence was duly emphasized. I heard two officers who had just finished a heavy task joking and expressing satisfaction with it. The interest of the game overpowered their appreciation of the seriousness of the position. There is sometimes among soldiers enthralled with their duties a heartlessness which gives one a shock. The disputed ground has not for them the sentimental value it has for us, it is merely a square on a chess-board. Perhaps this state of mind conduces to clearness of thought.

General Pétain, who was conferring with the Major-General, was not to be seen. I caught a glimpse of him through the doorway when a liaison officer passed through. I noticed that he had the undisturbed look and careful speech he assumed at critical times, his concern was only visible in a movement of his eyelids.

Colonel Duchêne, as precise and exact as ever, looked after a hundred details at once, some concerned

with the battle, others with the move. He gave the same care and attention to both. An Information officer, Lieutenant Jacques Duval, the old chief of the Postal Control which he had just left of his own will, who was attached to General Pellé in his defence of Noyon, was charged with the duty of telephoning to Colonel Duchêne as soon as the Germans had taken the town. It was to be the signal for the departure of the Command. Colonel Duchêne, when he heard that I had quartered myself at the Castle of Royallieu, told me to leave the mission's chauffeur with him, so that he could warn me if the move took place in the middle of the night.

As I came out, I met Duval, who was going back to Noyon. He had spent the whole night with General Pellé and described admiringly to me his strength of will and presence of mind, the indefatigable ardour of this leader who faced everything and surmounted all difficulties, without losing for a moment his habitual charm during those three days in which he hardly slept. He had found time to read, between his telephone calls and issuing of orders, the report of the young university officers who were attached to the educational branch, and, finding himself in agreement with it, had immediately written to them. I begged Duval not to sleep or get killed if he wished to avoid the capture of the Commander-in-Chief, since our departure depended on his warning.

When I returned to Royallieu, the enemy planes were again bombarding Compiègne, and I could hear the noise of the bombs aimed at the cross-roads, the railway, the bridges and the station, through which troops were constantly passing.

The chauffeur did not arrive till six in the morning to tell us that the order for departure had been given. Noyon had been taken during the night, but it had been decided to wait until morning before removing the Command post, having sent off final instructions. Profiting by this, I told Colonel Duchêne that I would go to Senlis by car, with Madelin and Chabannes, to give some details to the Anglo-American corre-

spondents. I should rejoin the Commander-in-Chief's train, transformed now into the Command post, at Chantilly where it was to arrive on Tuesday the 26th at ten in the morning.

At the stated time the train stood in the station at which I had arrived on November 23rd, 1915. A telephone wire ran like a snake along the platform. By this wire which led to the office-car, the Command post was once more connected with the whole of the great front. From it was written and sent to Paris and to G.Q.G. at Provins the *communiqué* of 2 p.m. on the 27th. I established myself with Colonel Duchêne; he wrote it rapidly himself to save time, as it was already past noon. I have kept the paper written in his small and firm hand as evidence of his complete calm and cordiality.

The French correspondents who had left the château of Offemont had stopped at Chantilly to wait for news. I gave them the latest information, as I had to their Anglo-American colleagues. Chantilly was full of artillery and lorries packed with troops, who were welcomed by the inhabitants. Careless, or like all Frenchmen, proud of being admired, they laughed and made friendly gestures to the crowd. I heard one of them say to a woman who had no doubt expressed her uneasiness, "Don't worry, Pétain's in charge." At four o'clock the General's train took us to Provins, where we arrived that night.

The Commander-in-Chief had gone that morning to Doullens, where the conference which decided upon the unity of Command was held. He could do so with a quiet mind; everything had been prepared and arranged by him with that care, that power of organization and gift of foreseeing the future which he possessed in so high a degree. The machine was arranged to its maximum efficiency. And in fact, in spite of the enemy's renewed efforts, which brought up fresh troops that day. I was able to write on the evening of the 28th as a result of the information received from Humbert's Headquarters: "The enemy is held by our valiant troops on the line Lassigny-

Noyon." That evening it was said at Provins that the enemy's onslaught was stopped. An officer of the Third Bureau, whom I had until then suspected of hostility towards Pétain's temporization, said to me with obvious sincerity : " The battle is the General's work entirely. He has once more saved France."

PART IV
FOCH AND PÉTAÏN





MARSHAL PÉTAÏN

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CHAPTER I

Provins

SINCE the German Army had cast the shadow of its sinister wing upon it in its advance of 1914, the little town of Provins had lived outside the war. Now the enemy was at such a distance that although he was still a scourge, the town no longer regarded him as a danger. At Provins was to be found the old provincial France of peace times : domestic, tranquil, and rather sleepy. There were a few lines of communication services of peaceful appearance, such as commissariat or medical, and some resting troops. The big farmers had less fear for their corn now than before. A captain of the commissariat, late a local cheese-merchant on the territorial reserve, performed the duties of town major. Under his protection, Parisians flying from Bertha had taken refuge in the town and its environs, ashamed to go right away into the south and yet preferring to be on the edge of the peaceful zone. Provins, with its sharply cut hills, its mediæval ramparts caressed by the dry and bracing air of the plateau, its four-sided Cæsar's Tower and the Byzantine dome of St. Quiriace, in the twilight, when the shadows turned the poplars into cypress, looked like a little Provençal or Italian town.

The sudden arrival of G.Q.G. roused it from its torpor. Since leaving Compiègne the convoy had not acquired a more orderly appearance. This flood of officers bursting out of the night, the clatter of footsteps in the deserted streets, the incessant rumbling of long strings of lorries, coinciding with the bad news in the *communiqué*, had caused a panic among the inhabitants. The quarter-master's department, in spite

of its efforts and the real activity it displayed, had not been able to find shelter for four hundred and fifty officers in a place where there were only a hundred and fifty billets. About a hundred officers, who did not belong to the privileged departments, were obliged to spend the night in the open. Roaming about in groups in the fine rain by the little streams which wandered through the town and gave it in places almost a Venetian look, they amused themselves by searching for the home of Hégésippe Moreau. One cannot help wondering at the vagaries of fame. Every one of these soldiers, whose literary education had been neglected, knew the two famous verses from *la Voulzie*. The obscure provincial poet had vanquished oblivion more successfully than Goethe or Pascal, not one of whose lines could these men repeat. The glory of dying in a pauper hospital is not enough to explain this popularity. But perhaps it explained the special respect of the medical officers.

In spite of this homage by the Staff to the most famous child of Provins, the citizens watched our arrival uneasily. This wholesale invasion produced the same effect as the hurried flight from Compiègne. This unfortunate impression was strengthened on the next day by a stupid action on the part of the municipality. Huge posters placarded on the walls announced that the arrival of Headquarters might result in air-raids. The municipality thoughtfully warned the population that as Provins had no cellars, dug-outs, or any other means of protection, it would be able to take no precautions. But, for all that, it added that the warning would be sounded by bugle. For the rest, it recommended the inhabitants to screen their windows at nightfall, and to dig trenches in their gardens. This administrative masterpiece determined the Provins refugees and a certain number of natives to bury themselves farther south. The rest lived in a state of apprehension until one day a wise decision suppressed the alarm signal. Ignorant of their danger, the citizens were no longer alarmed.

It seems that a dramatic recital of the perils we

had just escaped made to the authorities by some officer or other provoked this state of panic. Those responsible for the security of the Commander-in-Chief, his entourage and the Third Bureau, knew no peace once they believed G.Q.G. to be a special target of the Germans. In vain we told them that the bombardment at Compiègne was because the Palace happened to be in an area which any military strategy would select for molestation ; cross-roads, main lines, stations, and bridges. They insisted on believing that the enemy was after us. If this was so, his usual clumsiness should have comforted them. But not so. In the barrack buildings where the vital parts of G.Q.G. were installed considerable works were undertaken. A bomb-proof dug-out was dug twenty feet down to shelter the brain of G.Q.G., its members were left to take their chance. As it happened, the Command had good reason to bless the Compiègne attacks, for after the Armistice, Colonel Valentin, the kindest man towards his subordinates I have ever met, made these attacks an excuse for recommending for the Croix de Guerre many of his colleagues whose performance of useful but safe duties at G.Q.G. during the whole war debarred them from this decoration for military valour.

The cavalry barracks in which G.Q.G. were installed brought us back to the realities of military life. While the N.C.O.'s married quarters opposite were being made ready for the principal services, everybody did the best he could for himself. The Information Section shared the N.C.O.'s mess in a corner of the entrance building. A little garden ornamented with a pool in which were still a few goldfish formed a pleasant enough patch of green. On the bedaubed walls of the great hall which served as our office we read the names of the glorious battles in which the regiment had taken part. But the most curious thing was that the attics of the barracks were full of old but good-class furniture : Norman wardrobes, Empire commodes, arm-chairs, rather stiff but of a pleasing Directoire shape. The presence of this furniture in a State

barracks was inexplicable. We learnt on inquiry that it had been hired before the war by well-to-do young conscripts from a furniture dealer of Provins.

We shared this furniture, and with the help of portable objects made by the engineers, we made it do. The ingenuity of the quarter-master's branch gradually improved things. For instance, in the courtyard two large flower-beds were made, and carefully tended. This decoration was less for æsthetic purposes than for those of defence against aircraft; the beds were to suggest to the minds of airmen that this house with its garden was only a private residence.

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The day following our arrival at Provins work began again. Short though the journey had been, the gravity of the situation required unceasing effort. On that day the morning *communiqué* mentioned a slackening in the enemy attack. It was to be expected that he would persevere, but our artillery and the troops of the First Army began to tell. The rampart across the great breach was growing thicker every day. In the evening the news was not so good. The offensive, checked on the line Noyon-Lassigny, broke out in the direction of Montdidier; the Germans, employing fresh divisions had advanced and captured the town. However, General de Barescut declared that we should hold them. As the numerical superiority of the enemy diminished, the bravery of our troops would restore the balance. The road to Paris was already closed. On the 28th this forecast was not only justified, but a French counter-attack took three villages and regained over a mile of ground on a front of six miles. Once more our soldiers, commanded by a firm and clear will, had averted the danger. But if the future was still gloomy we had at last unity of command. We felt confident that owing to the foresight and instantaneous decision of Pétain, who had flown to the help of our overwhelmed Allies, these surprise attacks would not be repeated.

As a matter of fact, since the 28th the brain of the battle had been where Foch had established his

quarters, at Beauvais provisionally. It was there that decisions were elaborated, to be carried out by the Supreme Command. For the service of this lightning thinker a service of aeroplane couriers was inaugurated, and even they scarcely sufficed.

CHAPTER II

The Supreme Command

GENERAL FOCH had no sooner been endowed with his powers of direction than he turned his attention to the second phase of the battle, upon which depended the fate of Amiens. The German advance, turning like the hand of a clock, pointed towards the town. Were the enemy to break the crust which covered it, the sea would be open to him, our lines of communication between north and south cut, and the Allies divided. He strove for it with all his might until April 6th. In order to protect Amiens, General Foch moved French divisions up and British divisions down from the Armentières-La Bassée front. The leak was stopped and the wall so thickened that the enemy broke himself against it on April 4th and 5th. It was the end; after that the enemy ceased his efforts in this direction.

But farther north the line had been weakened, and it was possible that the enemy might find a weak spot. On the 7th the third phase of the battle began on the La Bassée-Armentières-Bethune front, with new chances in favour of the enemy. Once more the battering-ram forged by Ludendorff struck the lines and drove a breach in them. And once more a rush of divisions flung themselves in front of the enemy to stop at any price the flood which stretched north of Ypres and reached Langemarck on the 14th. On the 16th the onrush was stayed. But on the 24th new assaults developed simultaneously on the Kemmel pivot and opposite Amiens, in which the enemy was definitely held. The whole period was one of constant alarms.

This much became clear from the terrible adventure, that our enemies were masters of a new method of warfare. Already applied in Galicia, at Riga, and at Caporetto experimentally, it had proved its efficacy on a vast front hitherto considered impregnable. We knew all about it and had studied it, while believing that it was impossible against us. It seemed certain that there was no part of our front which was so defended as to be able to resist this new method, when applied under suitable conditions. Wherever the enemy had succeeded in surprising us and launching his troops armed and equipped for advance, we had had to fear a complete break-through.

In truth, we found ourselves confronted by a new condition. The rapidity of manœuvre of the enemy was amazing; not only the speed with which the German Command shifted the battle area and the assault against the spots they considered least protected, but also the efficiency of their method, the short and savage artillery preparation which paralysed the defenders, and the skill of their units in making their way always to the point of junction of French and British corps. The Allied troops seemed ill adapted to these unexpected methods, and had no defensive parry corresponding to the offensive thrust. It cost them all their courage and spirit of sacrifice to stand their ground. If they had been less brave, the attack would have succeeded, for as a matter of fact there was little manœuvre and the men fell where they stood. It is to the troops and the transport service that the honours of these successive stands is due.

At the same time it must be owned that our counter-attacks had not the power of sweeping all before them which the enemy's possessed. Our progress was soon arrested. Consequently we saw how difficult it would be for us to regain the lost ground. There was an element of magic about it. Until then no such advances had been thought of. What was even more serious was that it was perceived that the enemy's power was due to a thing which cannot be improvised, the

training of officers and men. The enemy, thanks to his numerical superiority, had been able to withdraw eighty divisions from the front for training purposes; but how were we to withdraw our scanty effectives, which were all needed?

For the future the brains of the chiefs must find a method capable of counterbalancing that of our adversaries. Up till now the indomitable will of the joint command not to give way, transmitted to the troops, was merely a makeshift. Things could no longer remain in this state. The moment when the infantryman would weary of being one against six must be foreseen, and the ingenuity of his leaders must find a way of lightening his task before he became discouraged.

At Provins the difficulties of the problem were apparent to everybody. There was an atmosphere of uneasiness as our reserves were seen to melt, and we conjectured how long the troops would hold out. The Staff knew that it could do nothing if the troops wearied. Until it felt this fear, it went on quite unmoved; for a Staff is like a gambler, who is not perturbed by his losses while he has funds to draw upon, but becomes gloomy as soon as he sees the bottom of his purse.

All General Pétain's cares were directed to the solution of the problem. He spent four days a week at his command post at Chantilly, where he received direct news from the front when he did not go there himself. He had set up a miniature Staff there under Colonel Dhée, a man of imagination like Colonel Serrigny but more methodical and colder. It was to be guessed that he had need of being alone, closer to the scene of action and overlooking it in order to devise the tactics of the future.

At Provins the Third Bureau studied new methods of reinforcement and prepared plans for the distribution of reserves. The Second Bureau collected the information from the armies, deciphered captured documents, and endeavoured to establish the enemy's order of battle, the state of his effectives, his resources

and future plans and to deduce the lesson of the offensive. The lines of communication were also active. Since June, 1917, Colonel Payot had been in charge of them in place of General Raguénau. Colonel Payot was typical of the men who played a decisive part in modern war which is hidden from the public; he was one of the essential pieces in the great nameless machine which may be truly called the machine by which war is won or lost, essential to every leader. We must be careful, however, not to employ the obsolete vocabulary which likens the battles of to-day to those of the past; we must avoid all comparisons with Cæsar or Alexander.

Colonel Payot displayed his worth in these critical times. He had a paternal expression, a short and stout figure like an official, but his speech had a curious provincial accent which surprised and disturbed his audience. There was something of a tiger's growl in it. His anger was terrible; dominated by his will, his departments knew no rest. A quiet and lucid thinker and prompt to act, he was the most valuable auxiliary of the Command in the 1918 campaign.

Inspired by such a leader the transport service daily endeavoured to improve the traffic. The motor transport and the road control devised an ingenious method. The long convoys found their way by coloured arrows placed on boards along the roads, each convoy having its own colours.

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The correspondents accredited to G.Q.G. were installed in the neighbourhood of Provins; the French in the little château of les Moyeux, the Allies in the sumptuous house of an iron-master, M. Dupont, father-in-law of Lieutenant Péreire, who, having been in the Cypher Section, had arranged this billet for his comrades. They were impatient to visit the scene of the fighting, but, although we were very prolix in our reassuring explanations as to the issue of the battle, and showed them numerous documents tending to prove that things were going splendidly, they were bluntly refused permission to proceed beyond the

very edge of the scene of operations, for fear of their being in the way.

Meanwhile they were strictly forbidden to use the word "infiltration" in their articles; this terrible word, which expressed the latest move of the enemy and his method of fighting, was feared on account of the striking light it would throw upon our present inferiority in the country and the Army. Not only has the word a suggestion of cunning, it expresses a treacherous action impossible to avert, of a kind to cause alarms. Louis Madelin and Henry Bordeaux were alone allowed to visit the battle-field, with the object of preparing a description of the French defence with which to combat the dangerous effect of the enemy *communiqués*.

This mission gave rise to a curious incident which illustrates the rivalry of the Staffs. Louis Madelin, having made his observations, came back to Provins and wrote a true and living account of the battle, which the Third Bureau thought worthy of publication in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The article appeared signed with three stars. But the effect it produced was not uniform. While at Provins we admired the accuracy of the facts and the happy way in which they were set out, and throughout France General Pétain was hailed as the prudent Commander who had averted disaster by his careful dispositions, at Foch's Headquarters and the War Office it was angrily read. They saw disloyalty in this simple and true story. Pétain and his entourage were accused of propaganda. General Mordacq, at the War Office, was even more annoyed. He sent angry orders to G.Q.G. that no article on current events was to appear without his sanction. Further, it was decided to hold an inquiry into the authorship of the article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. This was a comedy which alarmed everybody at G.Q.G. The desired result was not long delayed. A laconic order informed Madelin and Bordeaux that they no longer belonged to the Information Section, but were attached to the Historical Section of the War Office.

I was at this time a witness of a curious psychological

phenomenon. In spite of the alarming situation and the necessity which existed for conserving all our forces for a future effort, the impetuous spirits at Headquarters already dreamed of a resumption of the offensive. As soon as possible the signal to advance and overwhelm the enemy was to be given. The enormous salient which his advance had created made him vulnerable. By the simplification of military problems indulged in only by second-rate minds, the problem was resolved into the following dilemma: "Either we wait for the enemy and are finally crushed; or we advance, attack, and win." And the legend arose, even at G.Q.G., that Pétain was of the first alternative, Foch of the second.

During the period between April 15th and May 27th, when the enemy was preparing his new onslaught and we were anxiously wondering where he would attack next, the wave of nervousness which had preceded March 21st returned. A current of ill-considered "Fochism"—if one dare give it that name—ran through G.Q.G. In the very heart of the Third Bureau were men who believed that Pétain would not counter-attack and that he would thus endanger the Allied cause. They supposed, for no reason, that Foch favoured the offensive. And perhaps although, by nature, the latter would have liked to adopt a general counter-attack, it is just the possession of more than one string to their bows that makes great leaders. We speak wrongly of the Foch or the Pétain methods. We were to see in the next three and a half months Foch standing resolutely on the defensive and Pétain, when the time came and he saw the enemy was at a disadvantage, urging Foch to precipitate the blow.

Not only had Foch no intention of plunging into adventure, but he applied all his foresight to parry the enemy's next blow, and it was necessary that this parry should be at the precise point where the blow would be delivered. Where then would the enemy attack? It was an agonizing psychological duel. How one longs to penetrate the brain of the leader upon whom the great responsibility rested, to

see him dealing with the countless alternatives offered him, to follow his reasoning as he paced up and down, biting his eternal cigar! How one longs to grasp the thoughts of men of action in such moments as these! And if one thinks that Ludendorff must have known the same periods of intense reflection, unless one supposes his plans to have been made beforehand and mechanically executed, one might build out of their respective attitudes an historical picture, dramatic perhaps, but with an intensely moving pathos. It is the sole romance which remains in modern war, otherwise so material, and I must be forgiven for dwelling on it for a moment.

CHAPTER III

The Surprise of May 27th

WHAT was the decision to be taken in the early part of May? A leader like Foch, with his wide grasp of the situation, was well aware that his adversary nursed vast projects. Now, to a strategist it must seem that the most telling move at this state of the war was to complete the separation of the French and British armies. Ludendorff had been prevented in this design once already, but it was possible that he would renew the attempt. The front was consolidated and the Franco-British troops on the alert. The attempt would necessarily be costly, could only succeed by the employment of enormous forces and without the element of surprise. But success would justify it. It was therefore essential that this front should be the most carefully watched, and that our reserves should be stationed there, in which circumstances the struggle would be equal, with the best trumps in our hands.

But if Ludendorff were to attack elsewhere, how should we stand, with our reserves far from the zone of operations? Would he once more secure a success? Lest this should be so, would it not be better to divide our troops, and spread them along the front, so that some at least should be on the spot and the rest be able to move to the support of the threatened sector with little delay? This meant a certainty of retreat everywhere, but also of being able to avoid disaster.

Foch considered these alternatives, but he was not a man to take half-measures. I do not know if his ultimate idea was to temporize until the Americans came, for he did not know the real value of their

troops. Those who were already in France had displayed their worth; but these were regulars, while those who would follow would not be so. Could everything be subordinated to this hope? Personally, lacking definite knowledge, I do not believe Foch held this view. He was too ardent, too restive, too greatly convinced that success depended upon a bold stroke at the right moment, not to seize his opportunity, even at some risk. Was not the main-spring of his military policy to plunge deeply when he did plunge? His warlike genius originated in a reflex both mental and bodily. No one was more pragmatic than he. When he put his ideas into words he accompanied or anticipated his words with gestures. His definition of victory is well known; he explained it at Doullens before the assembled representatives of France and England, "A gap driven in with both fists," and as he said it he squared up like a boxer. The gesture appealed to the delegates of a boxing nation.

It seems to me, therefore, that he must have envisaged the dilemma thus: "If Ludendorff attacks on the British front, where I await him with all my forces, I shall infallibly check his onslaught. If he attacks elsewhere, so much the worse; but it would be better to be surprised anywhere but there, where defeat would be irreparable. Anything rather than separation from the British Army."

It is rare that the event follows theory exactly. The truth is that there were many other practical reasons which decided Foch to group his reserves in the region between the Somme and the Lys. Rupprecht of Bavaria, who commanded the German armies on the British front, was reported to have placed reserves in this sector. Our Allies, knowing this, and rendered nervous by the experiences they had gone through, demanded help and succour. And the principal duty of, as well as interest of, an inter-allied general, is to support a friend who feels himself failing. Further, it was always the belief of our generals that the main offensive would be accompanied by a feint. They

had this belief at Verdun, on March 21st, and again now. Supposing that the Germans attacked, say in Champagne, there was nothing to prevent them turning once more with their main forces against the British front, which was the key of the war. Until now none of the belligerents had been able to make a double attack, through lack of means, but now the enemy had such reserves at his disposal that the thing was possible.

The die was cast. With his usual boldness and that splendid confidence with which he knew so well how to inspire others, Foch accelerated the move of the reserve divisions northwards.

Pétain, more prudent, a believer in safety first, convinced that a Fabian policy was necessary and that a counter-attack could only succeed at a time when the enemy was exhausted, which was still distant, would have preferred that the north should not be favoured at the expense of the rest of the front. I have been told that at the end of May, scarcely a week before the German attack, he tried to retain the last reserves, whose movement north-west had just been ordered. Foch, staking his last card, would not hear of it.

Besides, everything confirmed him in his idea. During the end of April, and several times during the first fortnight of May, the Germans showed already that their attention was fixed entirely on the scene of their former offensive, both by attempting violent attacks in the neighbourhood of Hangard-en-Santerre and Locre, and by making desperate efforts to repel our counter-attacks and hold their positions on the front of the Avre and the Luce. On the other hand, complete quiet reigned on the whole of the rest of the French front. The discoveries of the Second Bureau confirmed the idea that if anything was in preparation it was in the region where it was expected ; elsewhere there was nothing to signify.

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But to complete the analysis, it must be confessed that if these indications seemed sufficient to us, it

was because we had not taken enough trouble to instruct ourselves as to the enemy's intentions. Our troops, during this period of uncertainty, did not penetrate deeply enough into the enemy's lines. Further, the special Intelligence Section, that mysterious organization which had a secret network and agents among the enemy, had been attached through a regrettable error to the ordinary Intelligence Department, with which it had nothing to do. One of the officers attached to the Intelligence Section of the Third Army spoke to me of the disorganization of this wonderful service, which required great skill and bold enterprise for its proper management. He saw our sources of information dry up one by one through excessive caution in the utilizing of them. Nothing could be more dangerous than the lack of so useful a service at the disposal of the Second Bureau in days like these, as was obvious.

There was also a certain carelessness as to the rest of the front. And if one sector more than another seemed safe enough, it was the Chemin-des-Dames. Why were we so certain of our security in this region? First, because, since the offensive of April 16th, when our troops dashed themselves in vain against the defences of the plateau, we had considered them impregnable. So sure of this were we that we had sent to this absolutely peaceful sector the Franco-British divisions exhausted in the last battle and in course of reinforcement. Second, because another factor of great importance had supervened.

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In order to demonstrate the importance of this factor in the march of events, it will be well to trace it from its source. Since General Pétain spent the greater part of his time at his Command Post at Chantilly, General Anthoine, the Major-General, had become the virtual Chief at G.Q.G., the sole director of its labours. I have already mentioned this man, who after a brilliant career as a combatant incurred violent anger and universal censure. It may be that he was treated unjustly. Broken on the eve of victory, his

experience as Major-General was only of troublous times. Had he remained a week longer, he would have taken part in the triumph, for it is hard to believe that his presence would have modified the situation, that his replacement by another immediately influenced the offensive of July 15th. Even a Major-General does not play so decisive a part.

In the eyes of the Staff, General Anthoine's defects were great. He neither inspired men by his cheerfulness, nor incited them to energy. He had an abrupt and satiric manner, spoke abruptly and loudly, and gave the lie direct; bad manners, accentuated in their effect by his height and powerful bulk. He had been nicknamed "The Satrap," and he certainly had an uncompromising manner and a tendency to disregard other people. Such was General Anthoine's nature. But I must acknowledge that he did not dislike people standing up to him, that he was amenable to good ideas, that he listened to them eagerly, since he was intelligence itself, and that he never refused to consider matters in their light, which is contrary to the usual habit of satraps. He was a despot, but a despot cultivated, well-read, and brought up on philosophy. He had a great brain, but I think he was not a great man. Or at least his contempt for individuals, based upon an innate mistrust of human nature, was intensified by a caustic wit which struck home and led unhappily to dissension. If to this must be added ambition and some opportunism, it can be guessed that his altruism was not very extensive.

He quickly made himself unpopular by his internal regulations, which were certainly not without reason, but were applied with the harshness and inconsiderateness typical of him. The officers of the Information Section, for example, having held private conversations on the telephone with the B.M.I.—according to the report of the listeners-in at the exchange—were forbidden to hold any communication except strictly officially. He told Major Gonzalès, the head of the section, that he should hold him personally responsible for breaches of this order and punish him

for any infraction of it by his officers. But what was the definition of official communications? In our duties of directing and informing public opinion, the line was hard to draw. An account of an operation for public information might develop into a private conversation upon the events of the day. For instance, every time an attack was launched, and before the *communiqué* contained any mention of it, the Press Bureau in Paris asked for the line to be taken by the Press in these terms: "What do your people say about it?" And the details supplied were enveloped in circumlocution for the purpose of misleading indiscreet ears which might be tapping the line. But to return to General Anthoine. Such decisions, which it was impossible to induce him to rescind, procured him a bad Press, all the more since he took others of the greatest importance which affected the organization of G.Q.G., and which were plainly due to his personal inclinations.

I will quote one of which I have first-hand knowledge. The anti-aircraft defences had since the beginning of 1917 been represented at G.Q.G. by a man of proved worth, Colonel Sacconey. It may be said that the A.A.A. Section was his work. He had built it up with tenacity and patience, despite the general indifference of the departments, which, as they did not believe in it, starved him of means. He devised the principles and recruited and trained the personnel. A fertile inventor with a vivid imagination, he thought out a vast scheme of camouflage of the ground and a "sea of light" which would have hidden Paris from the Gothas if it had been listened to. By means of an ingenious system, he had been able to inform us of the projects of the Germans by means of the routes followed by their bombing squadrons. At the same time, his labours had made night-flying possible. No one had been more plundered, more balked, or more fettered than he, without his being discouraged for a second. At length G.Q.G. unanimously recognized him as the father of the A.A.A. defences and the grandfather of aerial observation, to which he had also devoted his attention. General Pétain held him

in great esteem and considered him as one of the most valuable brains of G.Q.G.

Suddenly, without warning, Colonel Sacconey found on his table a note signed "Anthoine," in which he learnt that an artillery colonel had been appointed to take his place as Chief of the A.A.A. at G.Q.G. In great amazement he endeavoured to obtain some explanation from the Major-General, but failed utterly. Meanwhile the whole place seethed with indignation at the news. To deprive A.A.A. of so eminent a leader in the middle of operations seemed to every one absolute folly. Feeling convinced that General Pétain knew nothing about it, and fearing that the measure should be attributed to him, I informed him of it through one of his orderly officers. As it turned out, Pétain was entirely ignorant of it, and expressed annoyance and astonishment. He even said as much to Colonel Sacconey. But since the appointment had been made, there was nothing to be done. Colonel Sacconey received as compensation the charge of Aircraft at G.Q.G. But he never took it up. Colonel Beaune, the new occupant of his post, was fortunately a man of uncommon loyalty and nobility of character. He had hardly arrived when he spoke to Sacconey: "I have been appointed to this job without having asked for it. I know nothing about A.A.A. You are the originator of it and its natural director, and you must stay with me and run it as you always have. If you go, I shall go too." Colonel Sacconey, who lived only for A.A.A., was touched by this attitude. He stayed, and never were two men so closely united in their desire to be useful to their country. They are too fine an example not to be mentioned. But what can have been the reason for Anthoine's wishing to get rid of an almost indispensable man without warning? This is what I have been told, and it seems to be true. Soldiers appear to understand it, but not the rest of humanity. As an artilleryman, General Anthoine had no real belief in anyone who did not belong to his Arm. A technical service so important as A.A.A., in which guns were employed, was unsuited

to the direction of an engineer officer like Colonel Sacconey, whose speciality was aeronautics. Let artillerymen and aeronautical experts be put in their proper places ; a gunner who knew nothing of A.A.A. would be as good as a sapper who had invented it.

Such was the man, his qualities and defects. To his assets must be added tremendous aptitude for work, and, I believe, real military skill, of which he had often given proof. Further, one thing which everybody in the Army knew must be mentioned, he was a brother-in-law of General Duchêne. This is touching on a matter all the more delicate since the latter was finally disgraced, and I have already seen attempts to justify him. I never knew General Duchêne, and I can only repeat what was told me about him. The common ground of the accusations made against him was his unpleasant character. He was extremely bad-tempered, always grumbling and finding fault, and swore at every one without provocation. To approach him became an ordeal for his officers, which they only underwent when absolutely necessary. His Chief of Staff, compelled to endure his fits of fury, avoided him for days on end when he had overstepped the limit. Such things are hard to believe, but the truth was really incredible. His Information Officer, who was completely to be relied upon, and from whom, among others, I obtained my information, described to me the gloomy meals at the General's table. He sat scowling and grumbling ; his Chief of Staff rested his elbow on the table, turned his back on the General and said nothing ; and the rest of the entourage remained in a state of terror. The same conditions prevailed in the office. An officer would ask one of the Staff : " What is to be done about this ? " " What is to be done ? I don't know, go and ask the General ! I wanted to know this morning what was to be done, and he told me to go to hell. I'm not going to ask again."

The natural result was that the Staff was always on edge and quarrelling, not daring to take any responsibility ; its members, most of whom were good men, were discouraged, and had no enthusiasm for work

which was never appreciated, and always in fear of drawing down upon their heads a storm of abuse for some trifle. Yet in the rare moments when this bad-tempered commander consented to unbend, he showed a quickness of comprehension, a gift of illumination, talents well in keeping with his magnificent appearance and soldierly bearing.

But under such conditions a Staff works badly. The departments lacked co-ordination. Several times it had been said at G.Q.G. that disastrous results would ensue. The Major-General was accused of shielding his brother-in-law and hiding his mistakes. Thus at the time of the repulse on the Ailette which followed the battle of March 21st, there were certain irregularities which I noticed in the course of drawing up the *communiqué*. On April 6th, I was told that, following violent German attacks on the left bank of the Oise, our troops had taken up positions already prepared. I asked General Anthoine if the withdrawal according to plan had ended that day. If it had not, it was necessary to avoid speaking of previously prepared positions, which seemed to imply our intention and ability to remain in them. He answered that the movement was finished. On the 7th I announced, in accordance with the news from the Army, that the enemy had made no fresh move in the Chauny-Barisis sector. The incident seemed at an end, when on the 9th the 2 p.m. *communiqué* contained the words: "Our advanced posts, following orders, have completed their retirement upon prepared positions to the south-west of the Lower Forest of Coucy and to the south of Coucy-le-Château." On this occasion the Minister and the newspapers, seriously alarmed, asked what serious event had obliged us to resume our retreat, and how far it would lead. There were lively complaints as to the incoherence of our news. I do not know who was responsible for these contradictions, General Anthoine or General Duchêne, but I must observe that unity of view was not complete at the time, nor instructions quite clear.

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As for the attack of May 27th, the Staff of the Sixth Army, which was holding the Chemin-des-Dames, had not the least idea of the preparations which the enemy had been making for a month on this front. It was declared at G.Q.G. that there was nothing surprising in this, that if General Duchêne had not unfortunately been in command in this sector, any sort of a Staff, especially after the lesson of March 21st, should have been able to find out something of what was going on; that at least it should have made some effort in that direction; that in any case no other Major-General, not related to him, could have had so blind a confidence in the Commander of the Sixth Army, or could have neglected to inquire what was happening in this sector, which was obviously badly watched. I do not know whether these remarks were justified.

Of the methods by which Ludendorff hoped to succeed, the most important was the element of surprise. His dispositions were all made with this object. And for the realization of a strategical plan, viz. the separation of the French and English, was he likely to renounce this plan of surprise, when three years of war had taught him that, in face of a watchful adversary, equipped with artillery and equal in numbers, it was vain to hope for that deep break-through which could alone cause the final dislocation of either side? Our enemies had always sought success by falling on the weakest of their opponents. To bring about a second victory on the Western front of the same size as the first would not assure strategical victory, but it might sow the seeds of discouragement in France.

Consequently, he delivered his blow on a part of the front that was ill-guarded, the Chemin-des-Dames, in order to secure the greatest possible advantage from surprise.

The difference between the two leaders is manifest. Foch, imbued with profound knowledge, tended to view the problem in the intellectual sphere, to seek the decisive strategy which would provide the solution even at some risk. Ludendorff, an expert in modern technical warfare, with all its complicated mechanism,

had the qualities of a business man, and as such he estimated the situation, and desired the greatest gain at the least expense. It is at least curious that each of them, despite the divergence in their natures, drew their motives of action from the common teacher of all soldiers—Napoleon.

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The offensive of May 27th, prepared with even greater precautions than that of March 21st, was kept secret from us until it was launched. But, nevertheless, thanks to the heights of the Chemin-des-Dames, few sectors possessed more or better observation posts. In a work which appeared on July 4th, 1918, the Staff of the Sixth Army had the frankness to relate things as they happened. In this appreciation they disclosed that until May 26th the Command had no evidence of sufficient importance to lead them to expect an attack. The way in which the offensive was at last discovered deserves to be told; the description is typical of the information derived from prisoners; and shows the manner of their interrogation.

“Early on the 26th we made two prisoners in the Courtecon sector. Both belonged to the same Jäger regiment, but to different battalions of it; one was a private, the other an under-officer. They were sent to the Command Post of the 22nd Division. The private spoke of preparations for attack, the under-officer made contrary statements.

“They were not questioned further, and were sent by car to Corps Headquarters, where they were met by the head of the Second Bureau and the Army interpreter. The interrogation began again at 1.30 p.m. The under-officer was first questioned; he was ready to talk, and affirmed that the Germans had no thought of attacking in this sector. The private followed him, and declared that the troops believed that they were going to attack that night or the next, he was not sure of the date. More closely questioned, he said that ammunition and bombs had been distributed, but that field rations had not yet been issued. On the previous day he had seen men of the

Guards ; he knew nothing further, having been in the trenches for a long time.

"The under-officer was brought back, and told that the customs of war did not oblige him to speak, but that he had made certain statements and would be held responsible for them. It was an act of espionage to give false information. The man was visibly alarmed, and, upon being pressed, gave complete details of the next day's attack."

It was then three o'clock, and there was no longer any doubt. The Intelligence Officer warned the Command.

It was thus in the afternoon of the day before the attack that we knew for certain the intentions of the enemy. On the following night the German artillery preparation broke out between the Forest of Pinon and Rheims. At dawn on the 27th the infantry attacked.

There is no doubt that the Germans had taken infinite precautions not to alarm us. It is none the less strange that the experiences of March 21st were not sufficient to teach us to read the new game of the enemy. The appreciation of the Sixth Army declares that the investigators would draw from the signs they observed during the preceding month a fruitful lesson for the future. Nevertheless, the same signs which then failed to warn them must have been noticed by us and our Allies during the period before March 21st. How did it happen that they did not strike us on the second occasion, that another severe lesson was needed before we finally appreciated them?

I have been allowed to record the evil rôle played by military and irrational *amour-propre* in this matter. The tactics of von Hutier, known since January, 1918, were not taken as seriously as they deserved, because they were first tried upon the Russians, then upon the Italians. Even after March 21st the Staff was inclined to believe that if they had succeeded, it was because they had been tried on the British, whose troops were considered inferior. The tendency of Staffs to find some non-military excuse for their failures is pushed so far that after March 21st I heard the most romantic

suggestions to account for the surprise. An officer of the Third Bureau, very probably at the instigation of one of his British friends on the G.Q.G. Mission, told me that General Gough, as an Irishman, was suspect, and that some of his troops were tainted with *défaitisme*. It was recalled that in Italy Boche propaganda was accused of sowing treason among the troops in order to ensure the success of Caporetto. And is it not this tendency of thought which induces many excellent officers to believe even now the sensational story devised by General Nivelle of political intervention to account for his failure? In this case, as in others, the disaster was due to the same cause: new measures, to which we had not devoted the necessary attention. And this only shows the difficulty which the French, an intelligent people, full of general ideas and theories, experienced in adapting themselves to this technical warfare. The slowness of our Staff, so learned in the art of war, to concern themselves with the question of material, is also sufficiently explained.

CHAPTER IV

Critical Days

HOW shall I ever forget the terrible days of this offensive! As soon as we learnt, on the evening of the 26th, on what sector it would probably be launched, consternation seized G.Q.G. It was known that all our reserves were in Flanders, and that the Chemin-des-Dames was only lightly held. Our hearts were wrung at the thought of the troops upon whom the avalanche was about to descend. Nothing is more tragic than the situation of the Staff when it knows where the enemy is going to strike and can do nothing to counter the blow. It would be at least two days before a single division could reach the spot. But belief in the solidarity of the defensive lines was still so great, and ignorance of the enemy's methods still so complete, that it was firmly believed that the Germans would only reach the Aisne by their utmost efforts. This river was considered as their limit, and that after several days' fighting. Nobody thought of rest that evening. The departments concerned worked feverishly to prepare some sort of resistance; in the remainder gloomy conferences were held far into the night.

At eleven o'clock next morning, when I went to Colonel Duchêne's room, I saw at a glance the gravity of the situation. The places occupied by the enemy were marked in pencil on the map. I was horrified. Already they had crossed the Aisne and were to the south of it. There was no news of one division, which must have been taken prisoner to a man. The only rampart between the Aisne and the Vesle was the remains of the units which had fought a retreating

action and four second-line divisions in rest in the Vesle district, which left the same disproportion between the attack and the defence. As in the classical examples, the enemy fell upon our disunited forces and beat them in detail. The least prevision of danger would have allowed us to oppose, instead of two bodies of four divisions each, a mass of eight divisions, which would have shown a stronger front to the enemy.

What were we to say in the *communiqué*? We could not very well admit, at the first mention of the battle, the loss of the Chemin-des-Dames and the crossing of the Aisne, which was the bitter truth, without the risk of striking panic into the public. But unless we prepared the way, what arrears might we not have to make up? Besides, if the enemy *communiqué* announced the true position, we should forfeit all faith in our veracity. After much discussion, we decided upon the wisest course and the one which accorded with established custom. It had become our habit to regard the morning *communiqué* as a record of the events of the night only; consequently, it often made no mention of the happenings between dawn and eight or nine o'clock, of which we always had knowledge at the time. Hence the constant repetition of the words "during the night," which often shocked the purists, in the two-o'clock *communiqué*. It was a lucky thing it was so. In circumstances like these we blessed this custom imposed on the public of regarding the days of battle as a play in two acts, one devoted to the night, the other to the day, after which the curtain appeared to fall upon the drama. Now, by dealing only with the events of the night, it was natural only to mention the artillery preparation and the attack of the whole of the enemy's forces against ours, without any formula but the usual one: "The battle is in progress."

But in the evening the difficulty was even greater. The progress reported during the day was considerable. Some enemy units had advanced more than twelve miles. Fortunately the German *communiqué*,

contrary to its wont, was reserved and vague, especially in mentioning the points reached. It spoke generally of the capture of the line of the Aisne. It was therefore decided to keep regularly twelve hours behindhand, and to announce the most advanced positions maintained by us in our retreat on the day following their occupation. Thus the Aisne, which the Germans reached early in the morning, was declared to have been reached by certain enemy formations at the end of the day. As this evasion in the *communiqué* may cause confusion later among historians, it is as well to mention it.

I could get speech with no one at the Third Bureau, whither I went after leaving Colonel Duchêne. I was surprised to see the Operations Department utterly oblivious of the *communiqué* at this juncture. They almost refused to give me news, while in happier circumstances they prided themselves upon furnishing details showing the value of the successes of our troops. More than once I was furnished with false information, always far short of the truth. This was due neither to the head of the department nor to his second-in-command, whose calmness and frankness were admirable, but to the officers of the secretariat, who, through some false pride whose workings I did not fathom, could not bring themselves to disclose to us the extent of our misfortunes. It was as though the whole responsibility for this period of defeat was upon the Third Bureau, and I was a stranger capable of rejoicing in the misfortunes of a rival. I had no thought of being offended by this attitude on the part of senior officers, who were usually very obliging and only acted thus very rarely. I saw in it only a manifestation of the deep distress which they felt during this cruel period of disasters. The opening of the offensive of May 27th was, in fact, full of terrible grief for these men, who were taken at the greatest possible disadvantage. The reserve divisions, in spite of the utmost efforts, could only arrive from the far side of Flanders at the rate of two per day. As soon as they had detrained, they were thrown into the battle.

But, overwhelmed by numbers, they evaporated immediately like drops of rain on white-hot iron, in the words of an important member of the Staff.

There was a time before the first reserves arrived, when the enemy had nothing in his way. Captain Henry Bordeaux, who at this time was frequently at the command posts of the divisional generals engaged in the battle, told me that only desultory firing was to be heard on the front north of the Marne. It was then that the Crown Prince, seeing the way clear, insisted that the objective, originally fixed as the Vesle, should be abandoned, and a further advance made—to the Marne, if possible—in order to take advantage of this magnificent chance.

The Aircraft Section was in despair. The whole of the region between the Vesle and the Aisne and south of the Vesle was covered with aerodromes and dumps of munitions and every sort of material, which were impossible to evacuate for lack of time and labour. The medical services had also many important depots in the sector. Besides, the whole country which had been restored since the capture of the Chemin-des-Dames in 1917, had resumed its pre-war appearance and activity. With the suddenness of a clap of thunder the inhabitants had been compelled to flee, abandoning everything, driving their cattle before them, and carrying their wearing apparel. In several villages south of the Aisne, the enemy's arrival had surprised the inhabitants, who considered themselves absolutely safe. This was the full horror of the disaster.

One thing redoubled our affliction, a thing which was apparent in spite of the precautions taken to hide it from us. This was the semi-satisfaction which was felt at the news by our comrades of the British and Italian missions. The latter, since Caporetto, and the former, since March 21st, had been wounded in their *amour-propre*. Their national armies had been overthrown by the Germans. France, on the contrary, was in the eyes of the world an invincible nation, sustaining the coalition with its powerful hand; she alone was equal to the struggle with this terrible

enemy. Since the beginning of the 1918 campaign, she had greatly increased her prestige, even among the Allies. I had striking proof of this from the following fact. Among the English correspondents accredited to G.Q.G. was one who was the embodiment of the pure British type, proud of his country, which he openly proclaimed to be the first in the world. After March 21st this old gentleman had said to us with tears in his eyes: "England has just sustained the most terrible humiliation she has ever endured; we English have just been saved by France." The day after May 27th, he seemed to be comforted, and told us that our nations, equal in misfortune, would draw more closely together their bonds of friendship. As for the Italians, they lost no time in making us feel the effects of defeat. A Rome newspaper wrote that the French had experienced their Caporetto, boldly confusing the complete rout of a whole panic-stricken army with the sublime hand-to-hand retreat of a handful of men overwhelmed by an enemy ten times superior in numbers.

But to return to my story. The following days were no more reassuring, and the news that the Germans had reached the Marne was sadly received by the country. Some names have a symbolic value, and Château-Thierry is one of them. Until this town was taken, the people of Provins were calm, but after that there was much uneasiness. A lawyer from Provins, who had taken up his abode at Paris, replied with a sort of offended dignity to an officer who wished to prove to him that, since the enemy had not crossed the Marne, the danger could be met: "They have reached it, and you can tell the gentlemen of the Staff that that is bad enough." Château-Thierry is some thirty miles from Provins, by an excellent road. Although the bridges had been cut, it was thought that a raid by German armoured cars, fording the river and taking advantage of our disorganization, might be able to reach G.Q.G. without meeting any obstacles on their way. There were no troops to stop them. The suggestion was made to General

Anthoine, who gave orders, and I was told that barriers had been erected at various points on the road. Measures were concerted for removal, a dismal project. Were we to go through the Compiègne business once more? Probably if the enemy had ventured south of the Marne, as he might easily have done at first, we should not have escaped a second hurried departure. Every night German aeroplanes flew over the town looking for the Longueville viaduct, five miles from Provins.

Nevertheless, at the time of the greatest hostile advance, while we could only oppose to it a few scattered units, except to left and right, where our divisions held out heroically, I saw General Barescut and Colonel Dufieux engaged in a curious work. On the operations map hung up in their office, they were drawing arrows in pencil pointing northwards, marking the vulnerable points on the enemy's flank between the Aisne and Oise and Oise and Somme. If it were necessary to prove, in these difficult circumstances, the correctness of the calculations of the Supreme Command, this would be sufficient. All minds, as one could guess, were turned towards the counter-offensive which G.Q.G. had been ordered to prepare. These symbolic arrows foretold to me, like fingers pointing two months ahead, the triumphal march of deliverance.

At this time swarms of Americans began to appear on the roads. At Coulommiers and Meaux they passed in interminable columns, closely packed in lorries, with their feet in the air in extraordinary attitudes, some perched on the tilt, almost all bare-headed and bare-chested, singing American airs at the top of their voices amid the enthusiasm of the inhabitants. The spectacle of these magnificent youths from over-seas, these beardless children of twenty, radiating strength and health in their equipment, produced a great effect. They contrasted strikingly with our regiments in their faded uniforms, wasted by so many years of war, whose members, thin, their sunken eyes shining with a dull fire, were no more than bundles of nerves held together by a will to heroism

and sacrifice. We all had the impression that we were about to see a wonderful operation of transfusion of blood. Life was coming in floods to reanimate the dying body of France, almost bled to death, since for four years that blood had flowed from countless wounds. Nobody thought that perhaps these soldiers were not trained, that perhaps they had nothing beyond this courage; these were foolish ideas that never entered our minds. In a sort of exalted vision of the future we looked upon them as an inexhaustible source of strength, carrying everything before it, and so, even in those critical days, although the enemy had once more reached the Marne, and might well believe us to be disheartened, the hearts of Frenchmen were filled with a new courage. Our soldiers coming out of the trenches, stern and savage, were suddenly reassured and cheered by the sight of their brothers in arms. They said admiringly, "Fine-looking chaps, those," without hesitating to add with the Gallic wit that never left them: "Go it, my lads. You won't look like that in a week's time."

General Pétain was particularly struck by the sight of the Americans whom he met wherever he went. His mind, naturally inclined to see the significance of facts, showed him clearly the life-giving power they represented. At this time the name of the Americans was always on his lips, and he spoke like a builder of imperishable monuments would speak of an inexhaustible material which would allow him to build without fear of shortage.

He was truly pleased, full of confidence and saying so readily. He even embarked upon prophecy, which he as a rule disliked. He said: "The weld will be made, and then we have nothing further to fear. If we can hold on till the end of June, our situation will be excellent. In July we can resume the offensive; after that, victory is ours." I heard this prophecy with my own ears, and it was fulfilled word for word.

He said also that it was unnecessary to subject these magnificent troops to an over-long course of instruction. I fancy that the basis of his idea was this. These

men were natural fighters; one had only to see these sport-loving young men to understand that they would enter eagerly into the warfare of the moment. They would enter it in open country, like hunters. They would develop the instinct for it in the course of a few days if they were well led. In fact, he recommended their immediate amalgamation by battalions or regiments in our divisions. At first this was necessary, the American Army would be organized later. For the moment the Americans must not be paralysed in quiet sectors, but should be given alternate spells of fighting and rest. They had come over for that; the barrack life of the trenches, wearisome, dangerous, and inglorious, was not in accordance with their natures.

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When the inherent sadness of this crushing disaster had died away, life at Provins went on as before. As elsewhere, there was a surprising renewal of confidence. An extraordinary energy pervaded the departments. It seemed that the end of the nightmare was at hand, no one knew why. This state of mind had its origin, I think, in the sight of the Americans, of whom every one had doubted whether they would ever arrive in time, and the excellent impression they produced, although it had been prophesied that they could not be turned into soldiers for six months. Then their coming into action at Belleau Wood, where they showed themselves full of courage and dash, delighted the Third Bureau. Colonel Dufieux frequently said to me: "Do not forget the Americans in the *communiqué*; they are admirable."

Further, the reason for this new hopefulness was the certitude of the Staff that it had discovered the enemy's game and found the means of parrying it. I think I may say that G.Q.G. at Provins and its Chief, having no longer to think of the general direction of the battle, because it depended upon the Supreme Command of all the armies, had applied their energies to the tactical problem and had solved it.

It was evident, immediately after the May offensive,

that the enemy would try to reduce the deep salient which extended in the neighbourhood of Longpont and Moulin-sous-Touvent, between the two advances made by him on March 21st and May 27th. The forests of Compiègne and Villers-Cotterets would have been excellent bases, secret and secure for future offensives against Paris. He would therefore endeavour to secure them as soon as possible. Foch had dispatched thither a certain number of reserves with orders to counter-attack as soon as they could, in order to forestall the expected offensive in this region.

General Pétain several times went there himself, to direct the execution of the tactical instructions which had been given to the commanders of units. It is now known that our defence involved the evacuation of a certain area and the withdrawal to the rear of the units of the first assault, according to the principles of echeloning in depth. As had been foreseen, on June 9th the enemy attempted the capture of the forests of Compiègne and Villers-Cotterets. To the west of Soissons he advanced very little at considerable cost, but towards Compiègne he succeeded in gaining possession of the high ground of la petite Suisse, and in two days he reached Matz, in spite of the heroic resistance of our soldiers. On the high ground of Ribécourt, the defence was sapped by penetrations; a counter-attack ordered on the Oise, to be carried out by troops crossing the river to the south of Ourscamps, came too late, and the troops were compelled to recross the river in haste.

On the morning of the 11th, a group of divisions preceded by tanks, under the orders of Mangin, counter-attacked on the enemy's right wing and drove him back over a mile. If we had not reduced the new advance, we had prevented the Germans from enlarging it and had engaged the forces destined for this purpose. This partial success caused great disillusionment. I do not know why. An officer of the Third Army told me that his Staff hoped to see the fall of Montdidier at least during the morning. This was in truth to give the counter-attack a disproportionate value. It was

difficult to do more, because we were attacking an enemy in force, in the course of preparing for renewed efforts and with fresh divisions at his disposal. The true advantage of the operation, and the one sought, was that after it the enemy had no longer sufficient energy to pursue his offensive, which was thus broken on its third day.

Some one who was fully informed told me that General Pétain was not satisfied with the way in which, during the first two days of the defensive, his instructions had been followed. In fact, the enemy should not have been able to push on so quickly to Matz. General Pétain had a lively interview with General Humbert, who commanded on this sector, and treated him very harshly. He accused him, before his brother-generals, of having badly applied the tactics which should have led to the almost immediate stoppage of the enemy. As a matter of fact, certain commanders could not at first bring themselves to evacuate the heights, the summits situated in the covering zone ; on the contrary, it seemed to them, from the point of view of previous fighting, that these summits must be essential for an effective resistance and must be occupied in force. Now, as it happened, the enemy, in accordance with his offensive strategy, was careful to encourage them ; then, after a feint, he took advantage of the contour of the ground to outflank them, so that the defenders were either surrounded and taken, or compelled to retreat hastily before they were surrounded, incurring heavy losses in the process.

It was not so on July 15th, when every precaution was taken, not always unhesitatingly, as I learned from the highest sources.

CHAPTER V

The Fifteenth of July

DURING the first fortnight of July there was considerable activity on the front, and constant successes were obtained. Our limited attacks, made in every direction, were successful in capturing ground and many prisoners. Mangin's army in particular took possession of the high ground west of Soissons and the forest of Villers-Cotterets. The third German offensive was anticipated, which the enemy evidently meant to be decisive, but which was regarded without apprehension by the General Staff. This time it seemed almost certain that we should not be surprised. In addition to the knowledge that we had made adequate preparations for resistance, another important card was in our hands. The entry of the Americans into the war was making itself felt; 250,000 of them were ready to take part in the battle. This figure, although limited, gave us a greater opportunity for the employment of reserves. The historians who have dealt with the battle of July 15th to 18th have forgotten to give the place of first importance to the question of effectives. But this was the whole point. If we had been thrown upon our own resources, it would have been impossible for us to block so decisively the way of the enemy forces, at least to the west of Rheims. Besides, Foch, desired by the English to take precautions on their flank, would not have been able to comply with their demands and with those of Pétain, who declared that Champagne was the enemy's objective. Had he been obliged to choose between them, would he have done so correctly? Finally, where should we have found the troops for Mangin's and

Degoutte's counter-attack, which decided the fate of the war? It must be remembered that four American divisions of 20,000 men each fought in Degoutte's army alone, thus liberating nearly eight French divisions, employed in rear of the offensive. The question of effectives played the principal part at the end of the war. Everything would have been spoilt for the lack of five or six divisions, in spite of the genius displayed by our leaders. Not to perceive the fact is to confuse matters of primary and secondary importance. It must not be forgotten, however, that without the great economy of forces employed, in the face of universal protest, by General Pétain in the latter half of 1917 and the beginning of 1918, we should never have had sufficient troops for these operations even with the American reinforcements.

July 15th was the culminating point of the 1918 campaign. On the evening of July 14th, after midnight, those of us who were walking upon the ramparts of Provins beneath the sky brilliant with stars, heard in the north-east the rumbling of the thunder of the French counter-preparation which, a good hour before the opening of the enemy preparation, was poured upon the German trenches filled with their storm troops. The last act of the great German tragedy of 1918 was beginning. Soon another drama was to commence, but this time it was Foch who was to stage it.

On the third day of the offensive I went to see Colonel Duchêne at the time of the morning *communiqué*. General Pétain was in Colonel Duchêne's room, overjoyed at the enormous success of the Fourth Army, which had completely broken the German attack, but reading the papers as he stood with an Olympian calm. I complimented him upon this dazzling victory, and recalled to him the forecast he had made early in June, which was now being fulfilled. He smiled, and in excellent spirits went so far as to explain to me the measures which he had taken and his reasons for doing so, employing the words: "I thought that . . . I ordered . . ." He explained things naturally, like an inventor speaking of his invention. Thus, showing

me the scheme for the distribution of reserves in case of attacks on all parts of the front, which were spread out on Major Douvard's table, he said to me: "These are what the departments supply their Chief with, schemes to meet all circumstances which may arise, very well drawn plans. We have always plenty of plans and ideas, but in every set of circumstances there is only one really good plan, perhaps the least fine or magnificent of all, but certainly the only one which the facts make possible, and that is the one which must be chosen. The leader who bears the responsibility and makes the decision must have a true conception of what is *possible*. If he has not, he may be an eminent military theorist; but he is not a true leader."

When he had gone back to his own room, the conversation continued among the officers of his entourage. Their Chief's joy had made them more talkative than usual. One of them told us what he had said that morning shortly before my arrival, while he was reading the papers. One of these bore the headline: "Gouraud's tactics stop the enemy." Pointing this out with his finger, the General had said smilingly: "I am very glad for Gouraud's sake. To think that it took me a week to persuade him to evacuate les Monts!"

But a disappointment awaited this faithful entourage. Not a single paper, in the access of general joy which greeted the stoppage of the supreme German offensive, mentioned the name of General Pétain. Through a forgetfulness natural enough on the part of people who did not know how responsibility was shared between the commanders, the military chroniclers devoted their eulogies to Foch, the Supreme Commander, and Gouraud and Berthelot, who carried out the orders. Pétain made no complaint of this, and was not even aware of it; his reading of the papers consisted of a rapid skimming of the headlines when he had the time to do even this. But his entourage, whose business it was to watch the Press, as well as the Information Section, were indignant. These men, who had witnessed the General's unwearied efforts between the two

offensives, the measures he had taken, how he had stimulated the labours of the Intelligence Department, ordered raids in depth in order to test the enemy's lines, so that a week before the offensive he could inform Foch definitely where the attack would be made (and that not upon the English, as our Allies had declared), had again difficulty in restraining their anger at such ingratitude. These honest and loyal men had no one to blame but themselves. More careful of the General's peace of mind and tranquillity than of glory, very careful to do nothing which might displease him, they had formed a regular conspiracy of silence about him, refusing all adulatory articles and discouraging interviews and photographers. We told them in vain that it was a good thing to satisfy the papers and to allow them to publish their dithyrambs, sometimes exaggerated, it is true; that it was necessary, both for the soldiers, who always liked to read eulogies of their general, and for France, in whose interest it was that her leaders should be exalted; that if the journalists were discouraged, they would have their revenge. Nothing was done. The stereotyped reply was: "The General does not wish to be spoken of." "But," we replied, "there is no reason why he should know anything about it. That is what a Staff is for. Remember Joffre's, who were always concerned with the Commander-in-Chief's popularity!" In fact, General Pétain's staff was the only one of its kind I ever saw, avoiding intrigue, repulsing the flatterers who always hover about the seat of power, and never dreaming of founding their fortunes upon their Chief's career. But how great a feeling of security does the assurance of such disinterested devotion give to a man!

In a recent book, whose vindictiveness is apparent in every line—for which reason I mention it—it is said that General Pétain was opposed to the immediate launching of Mangin and Degoutte's counter-attack on July 18th. It is quite possible that, faced by the unreasonable desire for a resumption of the offensive which had arisen in the Staffs almost immediately after March 21st, which had grown after May 27th, and which,

if carried out on June 11th, would have involved the whole of our reserves in the Montdidier counter-attack, which was premature and could be only partially successful, General Pétain had applied the brake to that opinion, which, even at G.Q.G., was over-enthusiastic. To commence a general counter-attack before the enemy forces were sufficiently wearied and before a sufficiency of American was assured, was to compromise the campaign and its victorious conclusion. The best proof of his judgment was that Foch was not yet convinced that he could definitely turn his face northwards. On July 18th the moment had arrived, or so at least Foch decided. Did General Pétain think for an instant that it would be better to wait for a few days longer till the enemy was more deeply committed south of the Somme and had cast into the net which we had spread for him new reserves which Ruprecht of Bavaria was compelled to withdraw from the British front? It is probable. In any case, this was a very slight divergence of plan, merely another way of looking at the problem. It is certain, however, that General Pétain could not have objected either to the place where the counter-attack was to be launched, or to the necessity for launching it without delay. General Buat warmly advocated the immediate launching of the offensive, and General Pétain certainly agreed. Contrary to what has been said, he issued no orders to postpone the measures already taken; no such orders exist in the records, as I have taken care to ascertain from all those who would know. It seems to me, besides, that the decision in this matter appertained to the Supreme Commander, Marshal Foch.

It is difficult to see what posterity will think of the date chosen for the counter-attack and of the opportunity which presented itself. I cannot but bow before the essential fact that this moment marked the first recoil of an enemy whose retreat never ceased again until his final defeat. But a meticulous military critic, some future Director of Staff Rides fifty years hence, might well form other conclusions. He might suggest, for example, that the retreat of the German troops

north of the Marne, caused by the counter-attack, was effected too rapidly for our purposes, preventing us from sweeping away the divisions engaged south of the river, a proof that these divisions were not sufficiently involved. He might also suggest that the counter-attack was immediately opposed, as the *communiqué* of the 9th bears witness, by important reserves, destined by the enemy for his push south of the Marne, which were immediately diverted for the purpose. This imposed upon us a slow and costly advance which did not reach the Vesle until August 5th. Had we waited four or five days longer, we might have surrounded these divisions, since they would have been isolated from the rest of the army and their retreat cut off. But who knows whether in the interval the Montagne de Reims might not have fallen into the enemy's hands, and what the result of this would have been? So we shall do well to remain sceptical as to the utility of critical studies of this battle, which will remain an admirable masterpiece of clear vision and rapid decision.

CHAPTER VI

Pétain and his Entourage

DURING this period I frequently had occasion to see the General in his leisure moments and to admire the simplicity of manners and the cordiality which marked his entourage. The General's villa stood in a fairly large park at the end of the town, three hundred yards from G.Q.G. Of bourgeois appearance, it was scarcely even comfortable. Behind the house in the park was a small pond, upon which was a little boat. In the evening one of the gardeners sat in this, watching the float of his line, while the General, leaning his elbows on the iron rail of the verandah, watched him. The man was really a genuine fisherman ; but no doubt in Joffre's days this disguise would have concealed a detective.

There was no difficulty in entering the house. A hall where not a single orderly was to be seen led directly into the drawing-room. There, at a square table in the right-hand corner, sat the General, turning over the pages of historical albums, and, among other works, a contemporary encyclopædia in which were portraits of all the men of mark of Europe of the last half-century. Around him each man read or talked to his neighbour, respecting their Chief's meditations. Captain Bourgeois, entrusted with the distribution of the gifts in kind and money which reached the General from all quarters for the troops, and with the liaison with the American Red Cross, looked after the upkeep of the library. Captain Molinier, mess secretary and the oldest member of the entourage, had the gift of perceiving at a glance the slightest wish of the General. The General loved to chaff this officer, whom he, and

everybody else, called "The Baron," because of his imposing but jovial appearance. Lieutenant Thierry, his private secretary, whom the General treated as a son, lived in the house, as did Captain Molinier.

Besides these three officers, the *chef de cabinet*, Colonel Duchêne, the Major-General, the Heads of Departments, and Major Bouvard, Colonel Duchêne's assistant, all took their meals with the General. Another of the frequenters of the house, where he was often to be found, was Dr. Rostaine, the General's medical attendant.

In spite of the respectful atmosphere which existed, there was no feeling of constraint. The General rose about seven in the morning and walked round the vegetable garden which he had laid out in a corner of the park. He was a keen gardener, and inspected the vegetables and the ripening of the fruit with minute care. At each visit he admired the ingenuity of Nature. He said that when he retired he would devote himself to farming. He would like to buy a place on a hill, for he liked a view. At Provins he suffered from being in a place with no horizon, but he could breathe the air during his tours.

Pétain went to bed late, about midnight. But he was often still reading at two o'clock. A big photograph published by *l'Illustration* was taken of him in the office of his train at Verdun. A book was lying by his hand. I asked him one day what it was, and he told me that it was the plays of Corneille, his favourite author. On another occasion, when I asked him to tell me of a book dealing with the command of armies, he replied that I should find the truest and finest appreciation of a Commander-in-Chief in the *Oraison funèbre du Prince de Condé*. We had orders to bring any interesting articles in the reviews to his notice, and he read them all.

Of Anatole France he expressed this curious opinion: "Why does this man, whose work I delight in, not inspire me with confidence? I feel his attraction, but in the end I always lose it."

Once only did he display injustice to literature.

Pierre Loti had asked to be allowed to serve on his Staff at Verdun, when Pétain was commanding the Second Army. One day the latter saw the arrival of the illustrious writer, most elegantly attired in the *bleu horizon* uniform of a lieutenant-colonel. This for some reason annoyed him, and he let it be known with some curtness that he had no need of sailors to defend Verdun. Henry Bordeaux, hearing of this, asked him if what his officers had told him with much amusement was true. On the General replying that it was, Bordeaux said to him, with his natural outspokenness: "General, you have refused to appoint Captain Julien Viaud to your Staff, but you can never expel Pierre Loti from French literature." The General was much impressed with this reply, and the censure implied in it, and regretted his action.

As any journalist would have done in my place, I questioned the orderly officers, and especially Lieutenant Thierry, about the General. Thierry, who was a very shrewd man, understood his Chief completely, and spoke of him with a respectful enthusiasm which did not exclude perspicacity, for this quality, which was the Chief's in the highest degree, was conspicuous amongst his entourage.

From a thousand details, which I gradually learnt and observed for myself, I have formed a mental picture of Pétain which is perhaps only approximate, but which I will nevertheless attempt to convey.

The guiding principle of his mind, and one rarely found among soldiers, pragmatists though they be, was a sort of philosophic background, a noble fatalism compatible with that state of mind which Marcus Aurelius calls *æquanimitas*. A belief in the power of human will, certainly, and in the virtue of effort, but on condition that both are in conformity with those great movements whose issue cannot be influenced and which must be followed lest one be crushed by them. From this doctrine he derived the gift of immediately putting aside from events their transitory and secondary aspects which obscured

the truth. The General did not seem to believe in genius, considered as a supernatural power able to overcome fate, as those people to whom it is a source of miracles are apt to consider it. Genius, if it existed, was a quick and lively perception supported by the gift of common sense, for the finest perception is useless unless it is well balanced. Perhaps the word was invented in the days when there was a great difference between men, but in a high state of culture the chances of the emergence of a sacred genius are very small.

During the long evenings, which I have mentioned, when as a rule only the entourage was present, the General spoke his mind upon current events, discussing politics and war profoundly, and criticizing or praising the measures taken by the Government. I had occasion to take part in these discussions. Thus, he was not an advocate of the dismemberment of Austria. After the necessary reforms which the *Entente* would impose upon the Emperor, for example in the matter of the autonomy of the peoples of the Double Monarchy, he believed that the Empire alone was capable of maintaining unity and order among naturally hostile races, which, if left to themselves, would not cease from making war and endangering the peace of Europe.

He believed in a future political alliance between France, Austria and England, to form an effective counterpoise to Germany, should she not be split up. "Since we can no longer depend upon the support of Russia," he said, "which will remain for twenty years in a state of anarchy, we must rely upon Austria. France must always have a friend in the East." In 1917 his idea had been that if Austria could be detached from the Central Powers this should be done.

I found these ideas maintained also by General Pellé. Our military attaché, General Denvignes, had at the end of 1916 opened negotiations to this effect with the King of Spain, and in his letters to General Pellé begged him to secure the adoption of his views. But they were never seriously considered. The anti-

Austrian theory was paramount at the Foreign Office, and in many other quarters equally blind to reason. The unhappy General Denvignes devoted all his energies to the success of the task he had undertaken ; but it will be remembered how, when he made a slight mistake, he was punished for a policy which was unacceptable, although it followed French traditions and was in conformity with our interests.

During the triumphant advance of our troops in September and October, 1918, General Pétain explained one evening his ideas upon the conduct of the war at this period. This man, who was supposed to be a believer in the defensive, highly admired the offensive energy of Marshal Foch. "I could not too strongly urge him to press the offensive," he said. "It is the final rush, the enemy must be allowed no breathing-space or time for concentration. But it is no easy task to furnish the Marshal every morning with the army he needs. Our formations decrease from day to day through casualties, and it is impossible to reinforce them from the resources in the rear ; there is no time. When companies become too weak, two or three are amalgamated, and the same thing is done with battalions. Divisions, instead of being made up of three regiments, are made up of two. But I wish that every day there should be troops organized for attack and the same number of men in the front line. It is the same thing with material. Guns wear out and burst, one battery in a brigade is abolished, brigades are amalgamated, and so they go forward. Again the Supply Branch has told me to-day that I can only count on a diminished ration of hay for the teams. Very well, I shall leave some horses behind and the advance will only proceed with the number of horses that can be kept in good condition. It is no use burdening oneself with encumbrances. I am improving every day ; paper strengths can no longer be maintained, speed is the essential. Everything is mixed and confused, men, horses, and material. My army is disorganized ; but it still advances with a sufficiency of able-bodied men,

munitions, guns and supplies. It will take six months to reorganize it, but that can be done when victory is achieved. I am at this moment a manufacturer working full time with makeshift appliances." That is a remark which might well astonish people. Yet a modern general is a sort of an industrialist, and the comparison pleased the General. Having remarked in this connection that the organization of the Staff was one that could be applied to any form of business, he began to speculate how a newspaper could be run on the lines of the Staff. The political editors would form the Third Bureau, the correspondents the Second, the First Bureau would have charge of the printing and paper, the Transport Section of delivery, the Information Section would have statistics as to readers and their requirements, the securing of subscribers, and so forth. General Pétain was much amused with this idea, and ended by asking laughingly, "Then do you think I could run a newspaper after the war?" I could assure him that I was convinced that he would succeed admirably.

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General Pétain's relations with the Americans were always most cordial. Two officers of the highest talent, Colonel de Chambrun, who was tact itself in all its shades, but in my opinion too ironical for a soldier, although this quality or defect made him very amusing to listen to, and Captain de Maranche, General Pershing's French orderly officer, undertook the strengthening of the bonds between the French Commander and his American colleagues. They succeeded completely and at once. General Pershing delighted Pétain. He was the only man who succeeded in astonishing him. In fact, the humour and originality of General Pershing were surprising. He did not conform to the habits and customs of other men. If he agreed to dine with Pétain at six in the evening, he turned up unmoved, as though nothing had happened, at midnight, after a telephone message begging that he should wait for him. I have been told that one day he was to meet a very high person-

age, a sovereign. As Pershing's train entered the station at the front where the interview was to take place and where the august personage was already waiting, it was seen with horror that the General was in his shirt-sleeves, shaving. The station-master, appalled, backed the train out again and did not allow it to come in officially until Pershing had completed his toilet.

To tell the truth, if General Pétain always maintained friendly relations with our Allies, he was often badly served by the ill-humour of his Staff, who were subject to waves of dislike of the Allies. The English were frequently subjected to abuse, and bitterly blamed as the result of some friction between departments. The Americans also did not escape these crises. It is certainly true that there was a great tendency on their part to give themselves airs, at least amongst their officers. It was a curious thing that the Staff officers, or those corresponding to them, of this new country showed themselves as pig-headed as our own. A man whose name I will not mention, as it is well known in America, said to me: "I am amazed to see that, as a consequence of the war, an American military aristocracy has arisen, which despises the rest of America, although a year ago a professional soldier took a very modest place in our social scale." Thus the officers imagined that they could dispense at once with the advice which their French comrades showered upon them, perhaps rather condescendingly. As a matter of fact, I believe that the latter displayed some of that haughty benevolence in which our temporary officers are so adept; but on the other hand, their officers were often equally self-satisfied and opinionated. The American Staffs, immediately upon their formation, wished to act on their own account, and this caused at the time of the Argonne attack, certain troubles, not at the Front, for the bravery of their troops was incomparable, but in the rear, where the difficult problems of supply and convoy traffic existed, both being matters which can only be regulated by long experience, and which doubtless American business

men would have solved, but which were not to be solved by soldiers unaccustomed to modern war. The congestion of the lines of communication in the Argonne was very serious. Troops remained for four days without rations and finally took the course of going to the rear to seek food for themselves ; M. Clemenceau was held up for six or seven hours on a road in this sector. I have the less scruples in saying this outright about our Allies as they habitually laugh at all bureaucracy even in their own country. This was really the first appearance of that symbolical personage who is known in France as "Monsieur Lebureau." Now America in her turn experienced the actions of this personage. I hope she has now for ever escaped his clutches. Matters were soon put right, French officers arrived to lend a hand and adopted a more conciliatory attitude. All went smoothly, and General Pétain contributed more than anyone to appease his people, while General Pershing applied himself to the task on his side. Thanks to them, these bickerings between the Staffs was no worse than a fire among wet straw ; very little flame and much smoke.

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The General's character was one of excessive timidity beneath the cold reserve which struck all those who approached him. No quality is more difficult to master than this. With the advance of age, when man has greater resources of manner, he can conceal it by different means, of which one of the commonest is irony. Pétain's scornfulness, though natural to him, was enhanced by his shyness. Whenever he felt this paralysing shyness overtake him, he would charge forward with his eyes shut, and lash his interlocutor with cruel words. This caused an upsetting of the balance which restored his normal state. He frequently regretted the pain he thus caused. In fact, sarcasm is more bitter to a soldier than to anyone else, and it was upon soldiers that he most frequently vented it. There is nothing more calculated to embarrass a shy man than the attitude of respect adopted by his officers, with their necks stiff, their

bodies drawn up, and a fixed stare in their eyes. Before the Commander-in-Chief, of course, this formality was carried to the greatest lengths. The respectful officer never asked a question, he replied briefly and the conversation continually failed. After several attempts to carry it on, General Pétain ended by launching some barbed arrow at the wretched man, who turned pale with confusion. If on the contrary one helped him by a naturalness of manner to overcome this difficult moment, he recognized it at once with great gratitude.

I may say that M. Poincaré was endowed with the same shyness, which he overcame in the same aggressive fashion as the General, though his words were rather bitter than witty. It may be imagined how difficult intercourse was between the two men. Indeed, they did not take to one another for months. The President had been the victim of certain remarks which he considered disrespectful, and bore a grudge against the General for them. He had doubtless not guessed the real motives for these sudden attacks, which were not always very happy, it must be admitted. I think this state of things lasted until the end of 1917. But something happened about then to alter the situation. The cordiality of the President towards General Pétain was evident on the day on which he decorated him at Provins before the whole assembled Staff with the Médaille Militaire. It was the same day on which Foch received his baton. The friendly tone of the President, the sympathetic justice of his eulogy, the spontaneity of his accolade showed that he had completely understood and appreciated the man. I think that M. Poincaré was the one of all our rulers who saw most deeply into our military leaders and perceived their merits or demerits. The few words he said to Pétain on this occasion give a good idea of the shrewdness of his judgment.

On the day of that ceremony, we witnessed a brief and amusing scene. M. Clemenceau, who had captured everybody's admiration by his liveliness, his cheerful ways and his little round hat, came out of

the court of honour with M. Poincaré to get into the car. Having arrived at the door, M. Poincaré opened it, drew back, and said to the Premier, "In you get." "I'll do no such thing," he replied. "Yes, yes, go on," insisted the President. Then M. Clemenceau, agile as a young man, ran round the car and climbed in by the opposite door, while the President, amazed at his sudden disappearance, was looking for him in astonishment. M. Clemenceau's shout of laughter at this joke was quite youthful, and delighted us.

General Pétain was aware of M. Poincaré's sympathy for him, and on another occasion showed himself greatly touched by it. It was soon after he was raised to the dignity of Marshal. On his return from Metz he went to the President to receive the diploma which it appears he gives with the baton. That evening at Provins, seeing me in his *chef de cabinet's* office, he was good enough to ask me to dinner. During the meal he told us of his interview with the President. "M. Poincaré," he said, "having given me the diploma and complimented me, opened his arms, into which I flung myself, and embraced me with an effusion which greatly touched me, since I felt that it must be sincere on the part of a man usually so reserved." And after a moment's silence he continued: "Things didn't go altogether well between us at first. But then I have a bad habit of joking, sometimes rather ineptly and sharply. I have since learnt that in some circumstances one must restrain oneself and be more serious." At which General Buat remarked, in magisterial tones which amused me, to the great man who had so ingenuously performed his act of contrition: "I always told you so, General."

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Among the men who surrounded Pétain during this final period of the war there are a few whom I cannot pass over in silence, for the important part they played. I have already mentioned General de Barescut and Colonel Dufieux. The former, as soon as the bad times were over and he saw the dawn of the victory to which he had contributed more than any

other, hastened to secure an active command and took part in the advance. He was automatically replaced in his duties as Director of Operations by Colonel Dufieux, who was promoted General and thus became the youngest general in the French army. General Dufieux was no less active or approachable in his new rank. He continued to live in the mess with his officers, encouraging everybody, always in the breach, as accessible as before. In his turn he was anxious to take part in our success. The enemy was being daily driven back towards the frontiers of France; he applied for a command and left us. This perfect soldier obtained from life all that his loyal heart and his straightforward nature demanded. He had the joy of entering reconquered Alsace at the head of his division, on horseback, sword in hand.

After him, the place of Director was taken by a man designated by the unanimous voices of the departments and many persons in Paris—General Duval. He must be considered one of the best-equipped brains among the younger generation of leaders, and the most surely endowed with the faculty of rapid invention and with that brilliant talent without which one may be a good soldier but not a first-class man. Thanks to the power of spontaneous creation which he possessed to a supreme degree, General Duval came out of the war in a new guise. No prejudice of the schools could arrest his evolution. Besides, he had been everywhere; at the War Office, where he was the first head of the Press Bureau; later, chosen by General Lyautey as a speeder-up of the departments, he became initiated into all the work of the War Office; with the armies he was Fayolle's Chief of Staff, and in that capacity carried out the battle of the Somme with an ability which was not shown after his departure; and as Director of Aircraft at G.Q.G. he created the famous Aerial Division and got the best out of our flying men. Aviation was raised by him to an active participation in the operations, a true aerial cavalry, flexible and mobile.

Among his colleagues of the aviation branch, I should like to evoke the memory of a group of officers most of whom, very young temporary officers, displayed untiring activity and ingenuity which their Chief knew how to encourage. The wise Major Pujo, kindness and common sense personified, was the man chosen to moderate these devil-may-care fellows, whose exuberance frequently passed all bounds. All airmen knew Captain Walchenaer and Captain de Kéroul; the latter a very clever man, who after the Armistice died of influenza in twenty-four hours, having escaped innumerable dangers during the war.

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We must not forget the victorious Major-General, General Buat. He was typical of the labourer of the eleventh hour who received the same reward as those of the first. It is true that several times he came in to assist.

First appointed to G.Q.G. about the end of March, 1916, he occupied an ill-defined position and acted as Head of the Operations Department. I saw him then established in a little office close by the room of General Pellé's orderly officer. "I wish you would tell me what I am doing here," he said to me the first time I went to pay my respects. But in a few days he discovered his utility. Instead of concerning himself with the distant theatres, as had been arranged, he preferred to apply himself to the operations on the Western front. With his usual energy and the hardworking temperament characteristic of him, he took in hand the preparation of the battle of the Somme. I have heard Colonel Renouard congratulate himself on the presence of this colleague. Two men were not too many to oppose those who demanded the abandonment of the Somme scheme and an immediate intervention to relieve the Verdun front. Above all, two were not too many to resist General Castelnau's ideas, and in this respect General Buat's energies were unceasing. History will decide whether he was wrong.

But while, oblivious of anything else, he was getting

on with his job, the story suddenly got about the Palais Bourbon that the *âme damnée* of the execrated Millerand was at G.Q.G. This time there was a genuine fear of a *coup d'état*. The politicians, among them M. Malvy, made urgent representations that this dangerous officer should be removed. General Joffre resisted for some time, then determined upon the sacrifice of his valuable subordinate. General Buat remained at G.Q.G. scarcely two months. I often heard men whom I considered good judges express regret at his departure. I saw him on the night of his departure, in the streets of Chantilly, at midnight, going back to his billet with his arms full of papers which he was taking with him, for no man ever had so many archives; military documents of all kinds, leaflets, newspapers, and his memoirs, of which he wrote so many pages every night before going to bed.

He returned no less suddenly and unexpectedly than he had left. After May 27th, the murmurs of dissatisfaction with General Anthoine had never ceased. He was blamed for all the mistakes which had been made and which were certainly exaggerated. But what could he do to stem such a current? Members of Parliament who had visited G.Q.G. had reported these complaints to higher quarters. I do not know whether Foch, for his part, was pleased with the collaboration of General Anthoine with the general work. This is what I imagine, from the evidence I have, as to this delicate question. I give it for what it is worth. General Anthoine was accused of keeping a jealous guard over Pétain, with a view to increasing his own prestige, as the latter, preoccupied by more important matters, left all initiative to him. In the rivalry which finally developed between Foch's Headquarters and G.Q.G.—an inevitable rivalry, since their respective functions were very ill-defined; Foch's Headquarters wishing naturally to assume all authority and G.Q.G. wishing to lose nothing of its own—it is possible that General Anthoine displayed a greater concern with these questions of prerogatives than the

gravity of the military situation warranted, and did nothing to remove friction. He perhaps, as was said, put spokes in the wheel, explained the cautious attitude attributed to General Pétain, put a brake on the progress of affairs rather than accelerated them, and took unwise steps, like the one I have already mentioned concerning A.A.A. In short, his departure was thought necessary. By chance I heard of his disgrace and learnt the name of his successor three days before his departure. As General Pétain happened to be at Provins, I informed his orderly officer, who was incredulous. But it was nevertheless a fact, and General Pétain was greatly distressed. He was by nature always profoundly attached to his colleagues. It had lately been useless to suggest to him that perhaps Anthoine was wrong; just because of the latter's unpopularity, his Chief refused to listen to insinuations. This quality is perhaps one of the few weaknesses of General Pétain. Although so clear-sighted, he seemed to lose this gift when his affections or friendships were involved. Also the gifts which Anthoine possessed—his lively speech, precise and picturesque and his critical and bitter wit which spared no one—greatly amused the Commander-in-Chief, himself inclined to sarcasm.

General Buat's appointment was made under conditions of unheard-of rapidity. A pushing man was sought, who knew all about Headquarter services and was capable of speeding up the vast machine, and he was naturally thought of. He had just arrived at the Front in temporary command of the Fifth Army, until the return of General Berthelot. The latter was first thought of, but he was on a mission to America and time pressed. It was the first week in July, the German offensive was imminent, and it was considered that the change should be made immediately. For the first time, the plea of operations in progress was not allowed to postpone the decision. General Buat, who had barely taken up his duties, was reconnoitring his sector when he was told that Marshal Foch was waiting for him at Fifth Army Headquarters. He

hastened back, and the Marshal with quaint brusqueness asked him many questions and then went away. General Buat felt as though he was going through an examination. Two days later M. Clemenceau arrived, and there was another examination. The General had lost himself in conjectures when suddenly he received his orders. He arrived at G.Q.G., as far as I remember, five days before the launching of the attack and our victory, which gave him the air of a lucky mascot. It was a lucky moment for beginning so difficult a rôle, and this luck never forsook General Buat, who retained his post until the dispersal of G.Q.G.

I fancy that General Pétain did not look favourably upon the assumption of these duties by a man who had been thrust upon him. It was a regular conspiracy between the Government and the Supreme Command to give Pétain the Major-General they had chosen. I have learnt since that Pétain was highly incensed. Although he and General Buat were old personal friends, he feared perhaps this very excess of intimacy and also, it was said, the independence of will of his new Major-General. It is said that there was a lively interchange of letters between them. Pétain wrote in substance that he had not selected Buat and that his new duties would entail strict conformity with the ideas of his Chief. Buat replied that he had not applied for the post, and was indifferent about it, but that no one knew better than he how to defer his own convictions to those of his superior officer.

In short, this frankness on both sides smoothed away the difficulties. A week later there were no two men more closely united than the Commander-in-Chief and his Major-General. Pétain's patriarchal kindness, the lively gratitude he exhibited to all those who seemed devoted to him, and also his dislike of change, his predilection for seeing the same faces round him, made him permanently attached to the men of his entourage. This was probably the cause of his displaying some ill-humour when Anthoine was so rudely snatched from him. He took the first

opportunity of compensating him by appointing him to the post of Inspector-General P. of W. less than two months after his disgrace.

The reason why Pétain so greatly mistrusted the presence of General Buat at his side—for I am convinced that had the choice of a Major-General been left to him he would not have selected the latter of his own free will—has always intrigued me. There were other reasons than the trifling clash of *amour-propre* mentioned above. My own opinion, derived from my personal observations alone, is that there was about General Buat, who had apparently completely adapted himself to modern war, some spring of romanticism which made one fear his return to the old ideas of the Staff College. It is well known that General Buat was a fervent worshipper of Napoleon, but his was that strangely heretical worship evolved by certain theorists of the College, who saw in Napoleon everything that favoured their ideas, while altogether neglecting the cautious and calculating side of that great captain. An excellent thesis might be written on this subject: "The Distortion of the Napoleonic Theory by the Headquarters Staff." An example of this can be seen in the fact that a man like General Nivelle who expressed no opinion without basing it upon some precept of Napoleon, could attack the Chemin-des-Dames on April 16th, when that same Napoleon had written the maxim, quoted by General le Gros, in his *Genèse de la Bataille de la Marne*: "Do not do what the enemy wants, for the sole reason that he wants it; avoid a battle-field which he has reconnoitred and studied, and still more one that he has fortified and where he is entrenched."

Another detail comes to my mind which corroborates these reflections. At the beginning of 1916 the Third Bureau made me a present of a *Collection of the Maxims of Napoleon*, arranged by some colonel. The book had been annotated by various Staff officers from cover to cover, with the exception of one chapter which was completely free from notes and did not even seem ever to have been read; it was the one which dealt with

the employment of artillery in battle. I maintain that if it had been published word for word in a newspaper, it would have been thought to have been written only the day before to deal with the military situation of the moment, so closely did it coincide with the great need of the campaign—"Guns and Munitions."

So that, as regards General Buat, who at least had the merit of being a gunner and an advocate of heavy artillery, it is possible that General Pétain had perceived this romanticism and was a trifle nervous of some recrudescence of the creed of the offensive of which he had been the apostle before the war. For it is an incontestable fact that General Buat had fiercely upheld the doctrine of "attack, forestall the enemy by the attack, above all attack if you are the weaker!" This is the gist of the offensive creed, so dangerous when it is indiscriminately applied by fanatics, if indeed fanatics can ever have discrimination.

He himself told me of the campaign he conducted in Alsace as General Pau's Chief of Staff. When the latter, having only inferior forces, wished to retire on Belfort as a measure of caution, General Buat persuaded him that he should attack. This manœuvre gave us back Mulhouse. General Buat urged that he should push on to the Rhine, and when as a result of our disaster at Charleroi our troops in Alsace had to be sent north, he urged that there should be no retirement, and that we should retain Mulhouse and the bank of the Rhine. His conviction was that we should have kept this region in the same way as the tiny fragment of Alsace which we occupied since then. His confidence was certainly very fine, but can it be believed that the Germans would have left us in undisturbed possession of so fair a country?

However it may be, General Pétain, as I have said, very soon sank his prejudices; it is certain that no one was more open to the influences of those he worked with. He had not, like Joffre, that magnificent steadfastness of disposition which resists slow, gentle, persuasive pressure. He preferred rather to flee from

it and to isolate himself ; I fancy that had he been plunged into the atmosphere of G.Q.G. in 1914, he would perhaps have allowed himself to be won over eventually to its ideas. His own originality shone all the more brilliantly because, free of officials since the beginning of the war, he was thrown on his own resources with an entourage of men, themselves very independent, whom he took with him and retained almost till the end. Nobody more than General Pétain had reason to mistrust the snares laid for genius by friendship.

But the conditions which obtained in the days following July 18th were just those most favourable to the display of General Buat's particular qualities.

CHAPTER VII

The Last Offensive

GENERAL BUAT'S talents were profitably employed throughout the advance, which necessitated constant work in all the departments at G.Q.G. and in the course of which it was necessary to display boldness, to break down the obstruction of a bureaucracy alarmed by improvisations, and to take heavy responsibilities. Opinion was divided as to the final success of the general offensive; many thought that the Germans would hold the Hindenburg line for some time, and that they would use the line of the Meuse as a defensive front on which to pass the winter. There were interminable discussions, all the more lively since there was no longer any doubt of victory and the most magnificent prospects lay stretched before France.

Captain Picard, an officer attached at the same time to Pétain's entourage and to the Third Bureau, whose ingenious mind was always alive to great strategic conceptions, found a striking illustration to explain the situation. Pointing out the daily reduction of the salients which swelled out towards us beyond the Hindenburg line, he said, "We are in the eider-down, we shall soon find the mattress." The Germans retired fighting energetically and not like disorganized troops, since the English only reached the Hindenburg line in the Honon-Gouzeaucourt region on September 18th, crossed it at the same place on the 30th, and not until October 15th was it passed throughout the St. Quentin sector by our troops and theirs simultaneously. We wondered whether in the meanwhile the Germans could not collect a mobile army behind the

Hindenburg line and attack us with it, as they had done in Russia and Roumania, to relieve the pressure. But, engaged and heavily pressed upon a front of a hundred and twenty-five miles by our Allies and ourselves, who attacked with extraordinary vigour, they had as much as they could do to stop the gaps which were daily made in their line. Troops, material and time were no longer at their disposal. If Marshal Foch with his untiring energy had not pressed forward thus, they would perhaps have endeavoured to manœuvre, if not to relieve the pressure altogether, which was impossible, at least to improve the situation. But on September 29th the defeat of Bulgaria removed their last hope. Germany, thrown upon her own resources, cut off from the East, was hopelessly lost and destined to final defeat.

Personally I believe that the enemy's desire to collect the enormous amount of material accumulated during three years of occupation in the north of France was the cause of this desperate hand-to-hand resistance, which lasted three months and caused him the loss of thousands of men and finally disorganized his effectives. As soon as Ludendorff saw that he could no longer maintain himself beyond the Hindenburg line, that is at the beginning of August, he should have swiftly assembled his troops behind this formidable rampart. By such a shortening of his front he would have secured reserves which would have subsequently allowed him to retire in good order with a considerable army as far as the frontier. The German Government could have thence treated for peace with a good chance of impressing its adversaries, since it would still have had a solid army behind it.

But pride and cupidity, the standing defects of the German people, blinded the German Staff. They would thus have lost the honour of yielding our country piece by piece, which, alas, completed its devastation.

After the removal of Bulgaria from the war, which was shortly to entail the fall of Turkey and Austria, would it have been possible, in order to avoid losses

and the devastation of a vast area, to undertake a sort of rigid blockade, or to carry the war into the enemy's country through Austria? Who knows? I have already said that I thought the fruit was ripe and would fall by itself. But such suppositions—which I hope my readers will believe are not in any way spiteful—are easy to make after the event. The outstanding fact is the tremendous reversal of fortune brought about by a heroic resistance which nothing could break and the startling resumption of the offensive, persevering and untiring, which grappled the enemy upon the whole length of the front, tactics contrary to those of the Germans and which proved successful.

I like to imagine the picture which must have been formed in Marshal Foch's mind when his troops were at last in front of the Hindenburg line. This powerful visionary must have seen the wall cracking everywhere beneath the strokes of the gigantic battering-ram, crumbling in one place while resisting in another, and the tide of his troops pouring in through the gaps and finally sweeping away the whole dyke. And he gave the signal. When one studies the map of the whole front on which the daily advances across the Hindenburg line are marked, the impression of shaking and erosion is heightened. Under these conditions it was not a piercing, a false conception applied to a false appreciation, but a collapse of the whole fortified front. And one may believe that a great captain is not so far removed from a great poet as is generally imagined, since both are seers.

CHAPTER VIII

The Armistice

ONE day in the first week in November—the second or third, I forget which—I was going upstairs to the Third Bureau about four o'clock in the afternoon, when I met General Duval. He said: "I am going to tell you the most amazing news. Pull yourself together!" I looked at him in astonishment, his eyes were shining and his hands trembling slightly. He continued: "The Germans have determined to ask for an armistice; a message from Berne informs us that they have made tentative inquiries of the Federal Government whether they would act as intermediaries." I followed him into his room and he showed me the message. In spite of the innumerable false reports of this nature which had cropped up since the beginning of the war, the message was couched in such precise language that it demanded consideration. If only it were true! The rumour spread through G.Q.G. with unrestrained delight. Nothing else was spoken of, and we could hardly wait for the morrow to hear full details.

It was quite true. It is common knowledge that the Germans asked President Wilson for an armistice, and received the advice that they should apply to Marshal Foch, and that it was announced shortly afterwards the plenipotentiaries had left Berlin for the French front.

As soon as it was known that the news was correct, the Commander-in-Chief's entourage and a few officers of the Third Bureau set to work to draw up conditions for an armistice. There were soon two versions in existence. Both demanded the withdrawal of

the German troops from the occupied territories within a sufficient time-limit, the abandonment of all material not already evacuated when this movement began, and, on the other hand, the concession to the enemy of his arms and movable baggage. One version demanded the occupation of the left bank of the Rhine and the bridge-heads on the right bank ; the other was less exacting. Were these schemes drawn up in case they were wanted, or because Marshal Foch had asked Pétain for his suggestions ? I do not know, neither am I aware if they were ever used. But the unanimous opinion was that the conditions were too severe, especially those regarding the occupation of the bridge-heads, and that the Germans would certainly refuse them. Illusions regarding the feelings of honour remaining to the enemy were still current. These soldiers, thoroughly dignified and brought up on the delicate French ideas of honour, attributed similar sentiments to the soldiers of their adversary. But they were greatly mistaken. The most severe conditions were offered them, and they accepted them unhesitatingly.

I wish to draw attention to their spontaneous desire to afford the Germans the honours of war, that is, the retention of their arms and baggage. Marshal Foch, like a true professional soldier, agreed to this. A major of his Headquarters Staff told us of a scene during which the Marshal said : " The Boches are good soldiers and have fought well ; we can leave them their army. The Austrians are slovenly fighters, and deserve general disarmament." That was the sentiment of a soldier, a survival of the old chivalry of the battlefield, derived from military history, handed down from age to age since the Crusades, and difficult to abandon. Cautious civilians alone would advocate the disarming of the enemy. A soldier who has won does not fear leaving the enemy his arms. Is he not always ready to fight him should he attack once more ? For, even if the nations went to war to abolish war, no professional officer imagines that war can be abolished.

There is nothing in this to cause indignation, it is a matter of professional temperament. Besides, is not their belief in perpetual wars perhaps more rational than our illusions as to universal brotherhood?

However, I saw a momentary alarm in the heart of the Third Bureau. Revolution had just broken out in Germany, and the sovereigns were losing their thrones one by one in the storm. The ideas of liberty and fraternity seemed to be prevailing in the most reactionary country in the world. The institution of the socialist republic was proclaimed. Was this by any chance the initiation of the Golden Age predicted by the despised dreamers, the end of warlike conflicts, the suppression of standing armies? I saw the concern of my friends. They declared that this collapse of a whole well-organized social order was a grave danger, that without this counterpoise France, always restrained from her desire to carry out social experiments by the danger beyond the Rhine, would now be exposed to an unhindered outbreak of idealism.

At this time they seemed to be glad that the German Army had been left intact and the surrender of its leaders had not been insisted upon. In this respect the members of G.Q.G. were in striking agreement with the French governing classes. I discussed the matter with a professor at the Sorbonne whose knowledge of the German language had invoked his employment in an intelligence bureau which specialized in the affairs of the Rhineland. This man, who was of Alsatian stock, was certainly not one of the advanced type which is to be found among our higher educationists, but was of the most moderate ideas, of convinced conservative views, and above all a patriot beyond suspicion. He told me of the grave mistakes which our fear of revolution involved. Instead of favouring the Independents in their wholesome work, people of the type of Rosa Luxembourg and Liebknecht, who were determined to overturn Imperialist Germany, we lent all our support to the elements of reaction to help them in disposing of the enemies of the social order, as we

foolishly termed those who were by nature our best allies. I remember this honest man saying to me: "The bourgeois are about to commit a crime against France." The health officers of the Army on the Rhine hunted down the Spartacists and denounced them to the German authorities in accordance with their orders. I do not speak of matters upon which I am ignorant, for I learnt this from one of these agents themselves. The contagion of Bolshevism was foolishly feared, as if France, which had given so many proofs of discipline and wisdom during the four terrible years, was going to plunge into anarchy at the very moment of victory. But alas, countless people in France feared this!

Just as Marshal Foch and the Staff, as a result of an archaic conception of military honour, did not disarm Germany by their armistice terms, so the fear of revolution incited the heads of the Government not to insist upon it. They must bear an equal responsibility.

Armistice day at Provins was a day of madness, as it was all over France. I hardly saw anything of it. At nine o'clock in the morning I was sent for by telephone to the Command Post at Chantilly, where the Commander-in-Chief was. I arrived at one o'clock, after many stoppages. In the end the General lunched alone, for he had to go to Paris to take part in some ceremony. He was good enough to make apologies for not having waited for me. Then he gave me instructions for the evening *communiqué*, in which I was to announce the end of operations and the armistice; a decisive *communiqué*, he said, which would go down in history. When he had gone, I spent the afternoon alone with his orderly officer, Lieutenant Thierry, in the charming and silent house, in mild and grey weather, which seemed pale and exhausted with joy. I would not forget a day of such tender memories, of calm projects for the future, so placid and almost melancholy. At five o'clock a telephone message informed us that the General was going straight back to Provins. We

immediately made for G.Q.G., but were delayed by fog. In all the villages we passed through there was continual merry-making. We did not arrive at Provins until nine o'clock. I drew up the *communiqué* hastily, and as the Commander-in-Chief had not returned, I submitted it for the approval of the Major-General. But, typically enough, the latter was at the theatre, where the soldiers and enthusiastic citizens had improvised a performance. The Provins theatre, tiny and shabby, bare and cold, was full of people. General Buat and the other G.Q.G. generals were watching the performance from a box, and there he read the victory *communiqué*, while a soldier from the Conservatoire declaimed heroic poetry from the stage.

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I have little of importance to add to these memories. Others have told of the triumphant entries into Metz and Strasburg which G.Q.G. attended in rotation. Others have bewailed the wave of weariness which passed over France after the armistice. G.Q.G. experienced bitterly this period of folded arms.

The last striking incident was the departure from Provins to Metz. This move, with which the enemy certainly did not interfere, was worthy of its predecessors. An immense train, which, according to the timing of the Railway Department, was to arrive at seven next morning, took thirty hours to reach Metz. We detrained at ten in the evening, numb with cold, having eaten nothing on the way and spent the night in utter darkness. It was characteristic that in the carriages at the head of the train were the senior officers, while the horse-boxes were in the rear. By some inexplicable reversal, when we arrived at Metz, the horses were in front and the senior officers in the rear, the middle part alone not having been disturbed. Not a single orderly was waiting for us. A long column of officers set out to look for G.Q.G. in the rain, through a pitch-dark town, devoid of passers-by, along unknown streets whose name-plates had been torn down. There were also

thirty girls or young women in the train, typists of the Honours Section. One of these, who was on the point of becoming a mother, utterly exhausted, had scarcely arrived when her labour began. There was just time to take her to an hotel, where her child was born.

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G.Q.G. at Metz ! It was the apotheosis which every professional soldier had looked forward to since infancy. Once arrived in the capital of Lorraine, they had the well-merited satisfaction of installing themselves in the palace-barracks occupied by the Kommandant of the Prussian XV Corps, on the banks of the Moselle.

Our poor luxury at G.Q.G. seemed poverty-stricken, indeed, beside the insolent comfort enjoyed by the Germans. For a whole week our letters were written on notepaper with Gothic headings, for the departure of the enemy had been so rapid that he had not had time to empty the drawers. We made a fine collection of autographs and of portraits of the Emperor and the Crown Prince.

What a striking symbol of victory was the presence of the Headquarters Staff of the victors in the citadel of the vanquished ! But also what a contradiction of all the theories of Military Academies, which for fifty years in both countries had studied in their war games the measures for taking or defending the town !

Our transference to Metz was not made without arousing some criticism. It was found that such needless expense need not have been incurred. Surely a very mean objection. France had to emphasize not only the victory of her arms, but also that of her intelligence. The gigantic duel which had taken place, between two peoples who were hereditary enemies, between two antagonistic civilizations, had resulted in the imposition of the will of the greater brain.

I have only to shut my eyes to see once more, among other dreams of G.Q.G., the Grand Hôtel Condé illuminated from attic to cellar in the dark snowy

nights of the tragic months of Verdun, like a tall ship fighting against the waves and the storm. Despite wind and sea, she succeeded in making harbour. All glory to her. France possessed a Staff worthy of her ; like her Army, it compelled the admiration of the world.

APPENDIX

IN the earlier chapters of his book the author gives a detailed description of the Hôtel du Grand Condé and of the various Departments accommodated there. This has been omitted from the present translation as being of only secondary interest to English readers. As, however, reference to these Departments is necessarily made throughout the book, it has been thought advisable to give a short account of their functions in the form of an Appendix.

The *Commandement* was in charge of the internal economy of Headquarters, and at the same time of all police measures connected therewith. The town was subject to its regulations. "Thus, the inhabitants of Chantilly were instructed to procure special permits enabling them to walk in the forest, and were forbidden to remain in the streets between eight in the evening and six in the morning. A woman stricken with the pains of childbirth in the middle of the night would send her nurse to the *Commandement* to secure permission for the accouchement to take place at a specified time. After investigation a gendarme would be detailed to accompany the midwife."

The expenses incurred by the Departments appear to have been met by a very curious system. "The cost of heating, of providing hot water, and, as I gradually discovered, of purchasing drafting paper, was met by the Commander-in-Chief, his Major-General, and the Heads of Departments, who draw allowances for this purpose. When General Joffre embarked upon his campaign of economy, in the second year of his reign, the cost of hot water was reduced by the total suppression of baths. This suppression might be explained by the fact that the Commander-in-Chief and most of those financially concerned had bath-rooms in their billets. This was not the case with their subordinates. Later, as the result of skilful manœuvres on the part of General Pellé (who, being particularly scrupulous in his personal habits, could understand that others might resemble him in this respect), baths were allowed twice a week.

"Strangely enough, this passion for economy was not powerful enough to produce any sensible decrease in the use of stationery at Headquarters. In introducing this system into the organization the Government showed its cunning. But the honour of the establishment was at stake. To such an extent that too much paper could not be used in its justification."

The general arrangement of Headquarters was as follows :—
"At the head, the Commander-in-Chief, dispenser of energy, and under him the bureaux and services. These, on the one hand, delivered in digestible form to the Chief all the information he needed for his decisions ; and, on the other hand, transmitted these decisions to the troops. It was a double current, a reciprocal movement which never ceased.

"The Third Bureau worked out the scheme of operations upon information supplied to it by the Second, whose duties were to discover the enemy's intentions. The First Bureau was responsible for the supply of men and munitions, and was the instrument required by the Third Bureau for the execution of its plans.

"It was necessary to feed, clothe, supply with material, and generally look after the troops, and also to transport them from one part of the front to another in accordance with the requirements of the situation. The services performing these duties were grouped in the Lines of Communication (*Direction de l'arrière*, abbreviated to D.A.).

"So that the machinery should function properly, absolute co-ordination had to be secured among its component parts. Thus the measures taken by the D.A. must depend upon the scheme of operations determined upon by the Third Bureau. In the same way, the Third Bureau must base its scheme upon the resources put at its disposal by the First Bureau."

In addition to these principal Departments, many others existed, which the author describes in considerable detail.

The *Courrier* performed the functions of a Registry. "No document arrived at G.Q.G. without being opened and registered by the *Courrier* ; no document left without being duly numbered by it. . . . Towards the middle of 1917, 60,000 incoming letters and 70,000 outgoing letters were registered. The officers attached to the *Courrier* were also employed in conveying dispatches to and from the armies."

The Second Bureau was, in addition to its normal duties, responsible for the maintenance of relations with the Allied Missions at G.Q.G. "English, Russians, Italians, Belgians, Serbians, Portuguese, Roumanians, and Japanese revolved

about Colonel Dupont (the Chief of the Second Bureau) and his subordinates, the greater number of whom knew several languages. This necessitated an imaginative temperament in an officer of the Second Bureau. Far from their native lands, sometimes overwhelmed by the misfortunes of their country, our allies found great consolation in the society of their optimistic comrades. One can easily imagine the relief to be found in calculations of the enemy's losses in the course of a long war of which no one could foresee the end. 'In six months Germany will have no more troops to bring up against us!' This oft-repeated phrase heartened the most despondent. And with what persistent hope a fresh period of six months was entered upon when its predecessor had expired!

"The Allied Missions worked, grouped according to nationality, at small desks in the hall on the ground floor, alongside the *Courrier*. At about eleven in the morning this great room looked like one of those official photographs depicting the Congress of the Nations. And if the nonchalant posture of some Russian, stretched on a sofa, had not belied the solemn deportment of such ceremonies, the illusion would have been complete. The English later transferred their office to a house in the town and subsequently only rarely visited the Hall of the Allies.

"The most assiduous workers were undoubtedly the Japanese. The two or three little officers of this Mission, with their perpetual smile and cunning eyes, were always to be found among the Departments, eager to post themselves in the latest information, and to learn the newest improvements in tactics and armaments. Every day they were to be seen covering with fine hermetic writing countless mysterious pages which they sent to their own country. And one may be sure that their documents were not wasted. Over there, in the barracks of Japan, the little yellow soldiers gained the benefit of the experience so dearly bought by their Western comrades. Outside the office they were welcome in the town, whose secret history they well knew.

"The Russians, always faultlessly dressed, with a great profusion of aiguillettes and orders, used to arrive about lunch-time, heralded by the martial jangling of their rowelled spurs. Grave and ceremonious, they told amusing stories in the offices of the T.O.E., which they constantly frequented. Colonel Ignatieff, a colossus of magnificent appearance, recounted his exploits in Paris, whither he escaped in a car nearly every evening for the purposes of *liaisons* which were

anything but dull and of which the recollection caused him much mirth. But under this mask of gallantry, he was a very well informed man, of artful intelligence, and, while of great service to his country, showed himself a true friend of France. Attached to him at one time was Colonel Krivenko, a nervous and disturbing Russian, whose kid boots were the admiration of the place, and who was said to be regularly informed upon military matters. Captain Semianoff, correspondent of the *Novyie Vremya*, haunted the Information Section, where he handed round with ceremonious generosity cigarettes made of pale and perfumed tobacco which predisposed one to idleness. Our Russian friends established their headquarters in the villa of Marcel Boulanger, the Chantilly novelist, whose drawing-room, during the whole of our stay, was a rendezvous for all the Allied Missions and a regular centre of French propaganda.

"The officers of the English Mission gave us a high idea of the British Army. The generally accepted idea of Anglo-Saxon stiffness, so prevalent among us, seemed totally absurd in the presence of these gentlemen, so admirably dressed in uniforms at once easy and well cut, with wits combining shrewdness and irony, and a manner correct but genial. They led an aristocratic life, played rackets and tennis, rode, and gave receptions to their French comrades, while working hard all the time. Colonel Clive, an Englishman, the least English that one could meet, was by unanimous testimony a very talented officer and spoke a French which was the envy of the most educated among us. During the whole war he was the mainspring of Franco-British collaboration in the field.

"He was a striking contrast to his chief, General Yarde-Buller, who was the very type of the classic jovial Englishman, like the gentleman-farmer one sees in prints of hunting breakfasts, cutting an enormous slice from a pie and washing it down with a pint of ale. Nothing was more inspiring than to hear him deliver astonishingly British sallies in an accent which seemed too good to be true. He bred a whole collection of pedigree dogs, among them three little cocker spaniels, with long curly ears. One day, while showing them to one of his friends, he said, 'These are my children, all boys like me.'

"The Italian Mission at this time included General di Braganza, Colonel d'Alberti, Major Ruspoli, and a lieutenant with a French name, Blanc, doubtless a Savoyard from beyond the mountains. They were very attractive in their beautiful pearl-grey uniforms. When one spoke to them one found that Italian subtlety was no mere fable.

"The most esteemed of all the Missions, and the one whose officers were most truly at home at G.Q.G., was incontestably the Belgian, of which Colonel Meskarh was the head.

"The Roumanians, when they arrived at Chantilly in the autumn of 1916, created a great sensation with their magnificent horses, their shining dress, the plumes in their helmets, and the Roumanian pallor of their complexions.

"There were also the Serbians. Men of few words, they lived a life apart, rapt in their dreams of revenge. They stood at G.Q.G. as spectres, and as such they came to claim, incidentally and in sombre terms, the help which was given them so abundantly but so tardily."

The author proceeds to give an amusing account of the shower of decorations which fell upon those who were in immediate contact with the Allied Missions.

"To find accommodation for these Missions, each jealous of its prerogatives, was by no means an easy task for the *Commandement*. One could form no idea of the extent to which a smoking chimney or a torn carpet could endanger the harmony of the Alliance. In this difficult art of pleasing everybody Lieut. Lescot, the chief billeting officer, was a past master. In recognition of his good offices and his untiring devotion, he collected on his bosom one by one all the foreign orders conferred by the Missions. In this respect he had only one rival, the Mess Secretary of the Second Bureau. . . .

"In this connection it is pleasant to record the innocent ardour with which decorations were sought from our friends and allies. At each gazette, on the occasion of *fêtes* or anniversaries, a batch of orders was sent to the Major-General for distribution among the various bureaux, besides those conferred directly by the Missions. A competition, as open as it was keen, ensued. The more powerful Departments grabbed everything, and the rest protested. How many crosses with swords, eagles, stars, collars and ribbons adorned the same individuals! I have heard officers, usually perfectly well mannered, enter into bitter recriminations because a comrade had got something to the exclusion of themselves. It is greatly to be regretted that the native rulers of our colonies and protectorates never thought of sending Missions to G.Q.G., a step which would have increased the supply of honours and so brought happiness to many. This is an idea worth considering in the next war."

The Intelligence Department (*Service de Renseignements*, S.R.) was "only an element in the great organization whose duty was to enlighten the Command as to the acts and inten-

tions of the enemy, within and without the gates." Its Chief, Colonel Zoppf, "was reported to be of a mind subtle but inclining to the romantic. It was said that he was in touch with spies, male and female, and that nothing that happened in the hidden places of the war was unknown to him. Perhaps this was an exaggeration, but it is a fact that a great part of his work was plunged in obscurity and escaped the perception of ordinary mortals.

"He was known to be particularly interested in certain carrier pigeons released by French agents deposited by aeroplane behind the enemy's lines. It was known that he heard or had read for him with great interest certain letters which came from the front and others which were dispatched thither; that he had subversive publications seized and examined the announcements in the papers, to which he did not disdain to reply when he considered them of interest."

The Intelligence Department was also concerned with things nearer home, which the author describes in his usual lively manner.

"One branch of the *Sûreté* devoted its watchfulness to the conservation of the moral reputation of G.Q.G. The most severe regulations were issued in this respect. It must have been an ignorant writer of lyrics who made his chorus of soldiers sing the well-known refrain, 'Hurrah for wine, love and tobacco'! In modern war, at least so far as Headquarters are concerned, there is no room for love. The Staff officer must be as chaste as a vestal virgin. The sight of a suspected petticoat was anathema to Colonel Loreau, the head of the *Commandement*, who unleashed his most trusted hounds in pursuit.

"Posted night and day at the station, a detachment of the *Sûreté* examined the faces and hearts of all female passengers. Every fair unknown was infallibly suspected of carrying on an intrigue with an officer of the Staff and subjected to a searching interrogatory. It was necessary to assume the disguise of an ugly fairy to get through the moral barriers which the authorities established between G.Q.G. and the frail sex.

"To the credit of those engaged in these duties be it said that they employed infinite tact. As a matter of fact, they rarely had occasion to exercise severity, whatever may have been said by journalists always on the look out to enlarge upon any scandal. An occasional flirtation in the forest with attractive ladies from the suburbs who succeeded in evading the sentries, an exchange of smiles with the beauty of Chantilly after church, this was the sum of the moral digressions of G.Q.G.

In fact, every one was too anxious to represent worthily the great military machine to compromise it in any way.

"In spite of all, masculine vanity in this matter is such that even within the establishment itself the most fantastic rumours went round as to the luck of some one or other. A certain colonel with a red beard had the reputation of a Don Juan. Another had inspired a lively passion in a shopkeeper's wife. A third, indeed, according to the story of one of the watchers who surveyed the horizon from the roof of the Grand Condé, glasses in hand, reproduced for his own benefit *l'après midi d'un Faune*. For, enemy aeroplanes being rare at that time, the watcher employed his leisure hours in searching with his binoculars the groves of the forest.

"It was a curious fact, and one which perhaps demonstrated the artificiality of these stories, that senior officers acquired reputations for gallantry to a far greater extent than second-lieutenants. Hence it is possible that these suggestions were in reality a form of flattery extended by subordinates to their superiors.

"As a matter of fact, Colonel Loreau had no real anxieties except as regards the car-drivers. He suspected them of grave misdeeds on the strength of vague rumours. The car-drivers of Chantilly acquired fame in their day. For some reason the patriotism of the politicians was alarmed by the presence at G.Q.G. of a dozen or so young men of good family, whose previous experience with racing cars had fitted them to drive the principal liaison officers. As they knew the French roads perfectly, they were very valuable as drivers. The trouble was that two or three of them, oppressed by loneliness, developed certain not unrequited passions. Their delight took the form of copious libations of champagne, and the noise of the corks being drawn reached as far as the Chamber of Deputies. It was determined there that the noise of the guns could alone atone for these peccadillos. One fine morning, taxi-drivers from Guéret, Quimper and Riom replaced these sportsmen, to the great annoyance of the liaison officers, who from that day forward were exposed to continual delays."

So many stories have at one time or another been rife as to female influences at the various Headquarters throughout France that it may be interesting to quote an English writer in this connection. 'G.S.O.', in his book 'G.H.Q.' (London, Philip Allan, 1920), which is an excellent account of British General Headquarters, says: "The life we lived at G.H.Q. was truly monastic. We never saw an Englishwoman unless she were a nurse or Q.M.A.A.C. or some other uniformed fellow-

officer or fellow-soldier. . . . During our occupation of the Town (Montreuil) as the home of G.H.Q. there might be noted occasionally the arrival from Paris, or elsewhere, of some gay young lady or couple of ladies who, having heard that the British Army had its headquarters there, had decided from motives of patriotism, of *camaraderie*, or from less admirable motives, to come and enliven the dullness of the place. Departure would follow with ungallant promptitude. The same day or the next, the lady would move away, with a gendarme to see that she did not miss her train."

On the subject of the French map service the author has several interesting reflections to make. He tells how the original military map of France, the *plan directeur* on a scale of 1:250,000—which was one of the authorities upon which our own topographical survey was based—was found to be on far too small a scale as soon as the period of trench warfare began, and how the scale of the maps rapidly increased. This, of course, had the effect of magnifying the defensive measures of the enemy in the eye of the map-reader.

"One can understand that this magnification of obstacles on the map helped to produce a special mentality in the Command. On so large a scale the smallest success became a victory. Great rejoicing followed the capture of a fortified port or of such unimportant works as the Bonnet d'Évêque. The Hartmannsweilerkopf operations in January, 1916, which occupied G.Q.G. for a whole month, took place on a front of only three kilometres. The importance attaching to mere ground, the most dangerous preoccupation for a commander, was thus encouraged. When one had captured a few hundred yards at the price of enormous casualties, how far had one progressed towards the ultimate victory?

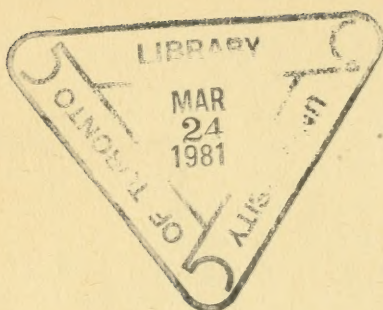
"This short-sighted outlook haunted the Command, even in extensive operations. The same minute precautions were necessary in the attack on a front of twenty kilometres as in the capture of a hundred yards of trenches. Hence six months was none too long a period in which to bring to perfection the preparatory labours and schemes.

"And then suddenly a sort of miracle took place in 1917. By an effort of will General Nivelle withdrew his attention from these details and resolved to survey the operations as a whole. He wished no longer to advance in stages of five hundred yards, but of tens of kilometres. Setting aside the thousands of machine-guns concealed in every fold of the ground, he dreamed of revising strategical manœuvres, the war of movement. Unfortunately his efforts were not crowned

with success. This change of view required certain conditions which were not complied with."

The author deals briefly with the flying services, the cipher section, the carrier pigeon service, the honours section, the postal and telegraphic section, and the D.A. Of the former he says: "The members of this important service were recognizable by the wings embroidered on their tunics, which had turned-back collars similar to those of the British service, and by their free informal manner. There were many young men among them, all good fellows and with the civilian outlook. The Press always maintained the most cordial relations with them. They were not opposed to the idea of making public the achievements of the fighting men. But all the same they censured the haste of certain 'aces' who did not even wait till G.Q.G. announced their victories before informing the papers of them. At this time Colonel Barès was in charge of them, and I have met few men who so well understood the men he commanded. It is due to him that permission was obtained to mention pilots' names in the *communiqué*. This rule was first adopted in the case of Guynemer and was subsequently continued, although certain restrictions were imposed about 1918. Colonel Barès, loved by some, was heavily attacked by others. A bitter campaign was carried on against him by the War Office, I am not sure under which Minister. I have always noticed this attitude towards the flying service, whoever was in charge of it. One felt that individuals outside the Army were responsible for this state of things, in furtherance of some unknown interest."







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